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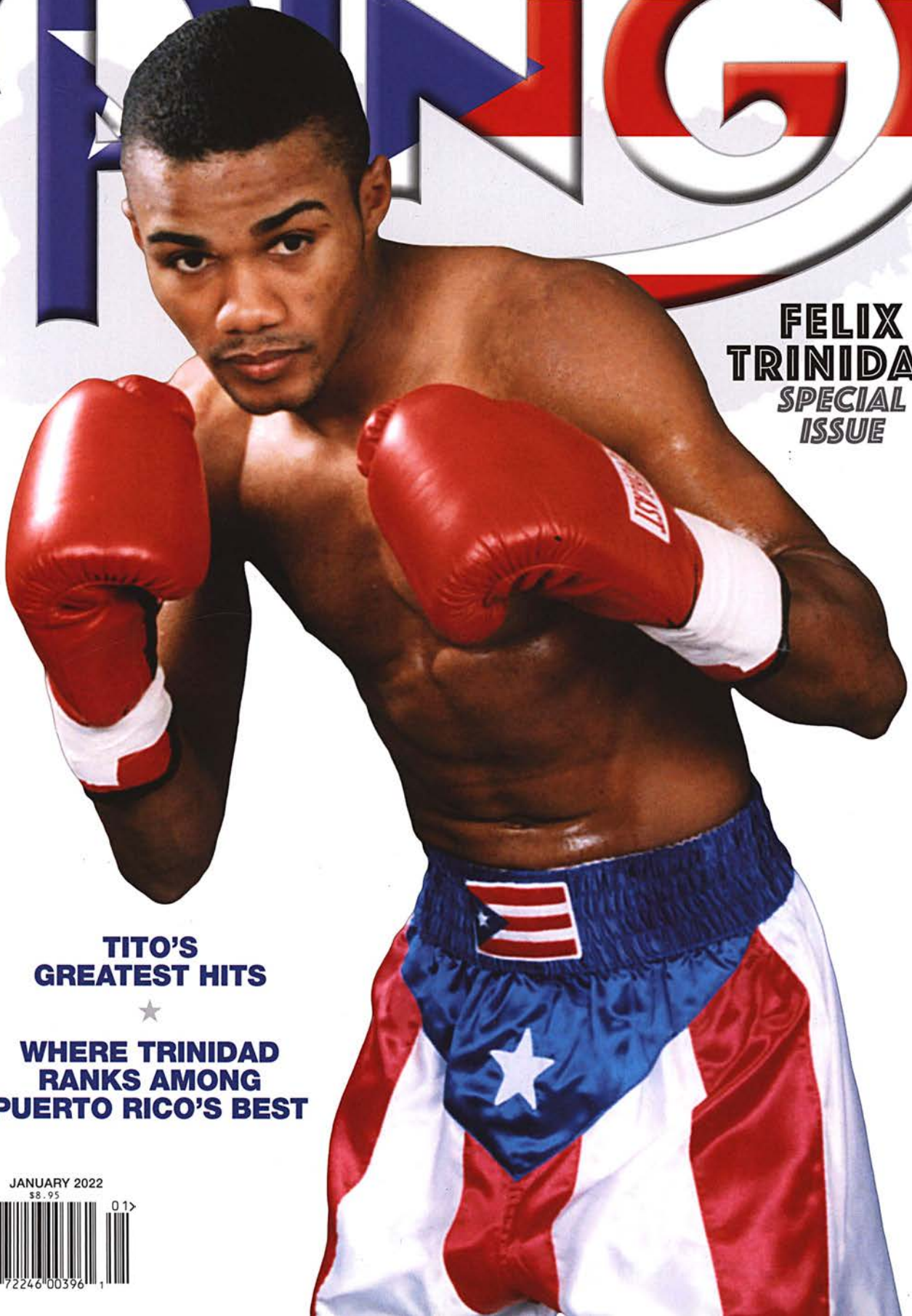

FELIX TRINIDAD
SPECIAL ISSUE

TITO'S GREATEST HITS

★

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The hard-hitting Felix Trinidad was a three-weight world champion.

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JOHN GURZINSKI

ONE MAN IS AN ISLAND

No fighter had a more loyal fan following than Tito Trinidad.

No one to this day had my heart pumping out of my chest before a fight like Tito Trinidad did. Puerto Rico has had some great fighters, but none as beloved as him. Was there anything more electric than hearing the crowd cheer "TITO! TITO! TITO!" and Tito walking to the ring with that big smile? And that was before he got into the ring!!! Once he was in there, you knew what you were getting: power, heart, determination, will, etc. Larry Merchant said something during the Trinidad-Thiam fight that still gives me goosebumps:

"You watch Trinidad throw these kind of punches, and you start thinking what God had in mind there was a fighter."

And what a fighter he was.

Luis Alvarez
Laredo, Texas

Years before I started covering the sport of boxing, I attended a fight card with my dad in Miami. The date was October 25, 1991, the venue Mahi Shrine Temple, and on the card was a young fighter from Puerto Rico named Felix Trinidad. My dad was from a town in Cuba called Trinidad, so he immediately took a liking to him. Trinidad won by TKO against Lorenzo Bouie that night to improve to 12-0, 10 KOs. I walked up to him after the fight and asked him for his autograph. He signed "Juan Felix Trinidad – 1991" inside the fight program. 11-year old me was thrilled. My dad and I came away impressed and thought this young man had a great career in front of him. Almost two years later, he beat Maurice Blocker for the IBF welterweight belt, and the rest is history.

Armando Alvarez

THE INEVITABLE DEBATE

Reading your "Division by Division: The Greatest Fighters of All Time," (December 2021 issue) I noticed Smokin' Joe Frazier was not on the heavyweight list. How is that possible? Frazier beat Ali in their first matchup, and no question he beats your next four on the list: Joe Louis, Larry Holmes, Lennox Lewis and Jack Johnson.

Joe Frazier in his prime beats any heavyweight in any era. Please explain why he would be left off of such a great list.

Michael Hopson
New Jersey

I have been following boxing for over 40 years, and I am not a professional sportswriter or commentator, BUT I have long-term experience and knowledge of the sport I love. Anson Wainwright is nearly out of his mind with his article "Division by Division: The Greatest Fighters of All Time."

For example, Archie Moore is an obvious No. 1 light heavyweight. Joe Calzaghe is No. 1 at super middleweight? Who did he fight in their prime? NO ONE! Harry Greb was a great fighter, but we do not have sufficient evidence (video footage, etc.) supporting that theory. Marvin Hagler should be at least No. 3, and Roy Jones should be in the top 5 middleweights (not super middleweight).

Julio Cesar Chavez is "the greatest Mexican fighter of all time" and most likely No. 2 lightweight; he wasn't a great junior welterweight (he got smoked by De La Hoya at 140). Mayweather should be a top 5 welterweight.

I could go on and on, and I recognize the old-time fighters, but it's hard to measure them because of the lack of video, photos, etc.

Maybe I will send an email and bore you with my top 5 all-time greatest, lol!

I was very pleasantly surprised to see Larry Holmes No. 3, and I think he should be in the top 5.

Thank you for your services.

John C.
New Jersey

EDITOR'S RESPONSE: Disagreement is expected and welcome, but don't blame Anson entirely if you don't like the lists; they are the result of his and seven other experts' opinions. Our website version of the story – bit.ly/division-greatest – includes a breakdown of how everybody voted, if you are interested. You'll find both validation and further aggravation there.

Leonard vs Duran I

OFFERING A COMPARISON

I'm sorry, but in response to the article "The Incomparable Sugar Ray Leonard" ("The Face of Boxing," December 2021 issue), I have to put Sugar "Run Away" Leonard in the same class as Floyd Mayweather. Neither are fun to watch when they run from their opponents like Leonard did with Roberto Duran in fights II and III. Give me a Duran or Canelo Alvarez fight any day against any opponent. They would stand and fight their opponents, slipping punches and constantly moving forward. Those are entertaining fights! If you enjoy running, go to a track and field meet.

John Cobarruvias
Houston, Texas

THE ABSURD AND THE MAGNIFICENT

The recent Holyfield-Belfort absurdity illustrated everything wrong in boxing. Two over-the-hill combatants – one a 44-year-old MMA fighter, one a boxing ATG pushing 60 – throwing hands, neither realizing it was supposed to be an exhibition, resulted in the predictable outcome. That was juxtaposed a month later with everything that makes boxing great: Tyson Fury's magnificent war with Deontay Wilder. Never before in the annals of sport have people been so glad that one superfight was canceled because someone exercised a rematch clause. Barring another Hagler-Hearns, this will be The Ring's Fight Of The Year, a battle that guaranteed each fighter's place in Canastota. There were no losers here, just two men showing greatness by digging deep time and time again until the better man prevailed. Salute.

Bradley Morris
Astoria, New York

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HOLLY STEIN

RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

TITO! TITO! TITO!

Trinidad created unforgettable excitement during the 1990s and 2000s.

Years before Felix Trinidad emerged as a boxing superstar and a bona-fide idol to Puerto Ricans around the world, he was must-see TV for hardcore fans.

I was smitten the first time I watched him ply his brutal-but-technically brilliant craft against welterweight titleholder Maurice Blocker in June 1993. The 20-year-old boxer-puncher had the aura and fighting form of a future world-beater, but I didn't allow myself to get carried away with his second-round demolition of Blocker.

Junior middleweight champ Terry Norris had stopped Blocker in two punishing rounds just four months earlier, so I wondered if Trinidad had caught the fading veteran at the right time. Could the beyond-his-years poise, uncanny punch precision and frightening power that overwhelmed Blocker be a bit of an illusion?

Trinidad emphatically answered that question less than two months later with his first title defense against Luis Garcia, a rugged contender from Venezuela whose only losses were split decisions to Blocker and Meldrick Taylor in title bouts. Trinidad, fighting in front of a packed arena in Bayamon, violently sent Garcia to the canvas four times in the opening round with deadly accurate bombs. The fight was over in two and half minutes, but it could have (should have) ended after the second knockdown.

Trinidad was real and I was hooked.

I loved his rhythmic boxing style and textbook punching technique. He fought with confidence and purpose, but he wasn't sloppy or impetuous. Trinidad was laser focused on landing the KO punch. When he hurt his opponent, his excitement was evident, as was the spiritual connection he had with his fans, who fueled his furious finishes.

As the level of his competition increased along with his popularity, it seemed as though his legion of fans could literally *will* him to overcome any adversity with their chants of "Tito! Tito! Tito!"

But as supernatural as Trinidad often was in the ring, he appeared humble and almost harmless, outside

Trinidad outclassed and overwhelmed once-beaten contender Larry Barnes in 1995.

of it. I liked that one of the most skilled seek-and-destroy fighters in the sport was a happy-go-lucky fellow with a boyish face, friendly smile, narrow shoulders, and skinny arms.

I went out of my way to watch his welterweight title bouts, usually on Showtime or SET (the cable network's pay-per-view arm). Trinidad was one of those rare fighters who was exciting even when he faced sub-par opposition. When sharing the ring with world-class fighters, he was sensational.

Hardcore fans anticipated Trinidad's title defenses against undefeated contenders Yori Boy Campas (56-0) and Oba Carr (32-0), both on Julio Cesar Chavez undercards in 1994, more than the main events of those pay-per-view shows. Trinidad didn't disappoint and the boxing world was buzzing about him by the end of 1994. Over the next five years, Trinidad gradually evolved into a bona-fide attraction in New York City and a pay-per-view headliner.

I was an aspiring fight scribe by 1999. I wrote about his showdowns with the great Pernell Whitaker and the sport's brightest star, Oscar De La Hoya, for Don King's fight programs, Latino Boxing magazine, and my own website HouseofBoxing.com.

My boxing journalism career advanced just in time to witness Trinidad's zenith from press row. Starting in March 2000, I covered five of Trinidad's biggest fights over the next five years: David Reid, Fernando Vargas, William Joppy, Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright.

If you've been a fan for more than 20 years, you probably watched most, if not all, of these bouts live. If you were at any of these events, I'm sure you have memories of them that will last a lifetime.

Here are some of my recollections during Trinidad's dramatic rise and fall between the Reid and Wright fights.

- HouseofBoxing.com co-founder Gary Randall and I were debating who would win the Reid-Trinidad matchup one week before their showdown, while covering the Oscar De La Hoya-Derrell Coley fight at Madison Square Garden. I liked Trinidad. Gary liked Reid. As we argued in the media center, I noticed former light heavyweight champ Jose Torres poking around what was left on a table of complimentary snacks. It wasn't fair to bring a Puerto Rican hall of famer into the debate, but I couldn't resist. "Mr. Torres," I called out to him. "Trinidad is going to beat David Reid, right?" Torres looked up as he mixed peanuts and M&Ms in a cup and yelled: "Of course! Of course! It's Tito's time!"
- Reid-Trinidad was the first major boxing event I covered as a fulltime boxing writer (HouseofBoxing had been acquired by a company the week of the De La Hoya-Coley fight, thus my hobby became my job). I sat next to Ring Magazine Editor-In-Chief Nigel Collins in the media section outside Caesars Palace in Las Vegas and I could sense the nerves he had for Reid. Being a Philadelphia native and an Olympic gold medalist, Collins and The Ring (which was based near Philly) had closely covered Reid's career. I know it was hard for him to witness the systematic beating Trinidad put on Reid over the second half of that fight. As thrilled as I was to finally see Trinidad fight live, I was very uncomfortable with the punishment Reid took that night.
- HouseofBoxing was just as close to Fernando Vargas as The Ring was with Reid. We were based in Los Angeles. El Feroz was from nearby Oxnard. Randall became close friends with Vargas, and we were frequent guests at his training camps. I thought Vargas had the right stuff to beat Trinidad, but while he had his moments, he ultimately took just as much punishment as Reid did vs. the Puerto Rican hero. The opening round was unforgettable. I thought Vargas would go the way of Luis Garcia, but his will and pride wouldn't allow it. The crowd inside the Mandalay Bay Event Center stood a lot more than they sat during that fight.
- MaxBoxing.com, my second website, co-owned by Randall, Steve Kim, and Thomas Gerbasi, was formed in 2001, just in time for Don King's and HBO's middleweight tournament. Kim and I covered all three bouts, which took place at Madison Square Garden. To this day, Joppy-Trinidad is the most electric atmosphere I've ever witnessed in boxing. It was like the entire Puerto Rican Day Parade was crammed inside of the arena. The fans exploded with unbridled excitement when Trinidad made his walk to the ring. Media tables were tipped over, dumping laptops, notepads, and cups of coffee to the floor, as the Puerto Rican media on press row momentarily lost their minds, jumped to their feet, and screamed "Tito!" The noise and passion were almost overwhelming. During the deafening roar, I looked directly behind me where Bert Sugar and Budd Schulberg sat. Between them, they had 100 years of boxing coverage experience, yet they seemed as awed as I was. I made eye contact with Schulberg, who slowly nodded his head as if to say "Yeah, kid, this is special."
- Trinidad-Joppy is the liveliest celebration I've experienced in boxing, and, due to the September 11 attacks, Trinidad-Hopkins is the most solemn event I've covered. Trinidad's faithful filled MSG in support of their ultimate champion and Hopkins broke their hearts. I've never seen so many grown men cry. They openly wept as they left the arena, and the tears continued on their subway rides home and on the elevators to their rooms at nearby hotels. I don't think it was Trinidad's first loss that got to them, it was the realization that the long and glorious ride was over or nearly done.
- Prior to Trinidad's fight with Hacine Cherifi in San Juan in 2002, Randall and I traveled to the island along with chaperone Lee Santiago to film a MaxBoxing video feature on the comeback. Many boxing insiders told us the trip would be a waste of time and money because the Trinidads were extremely private, especially with "outsiders," during training camp time. But we were welcomed into their gym. Trinidad was as amped in front of Randall's camcorder as he was with the crowd of well wishers who cheered for him every time he paused his workout to wave to them from the second story window. After his workout, Trinidad shared orange slices with us as he talked about the importance of fighting one last time in front of his people. He was as friendly and down-to-earth as I figured he was all those years ago.

Trinidad fought three times over the next six years following his four-round stoppage of Cherifi. He lost his final two bouts to Wright and Roy Jones Jr., but his popularity never waned. Win or lose, Trinidad honored Puerto Rico's rich boxing tradition by challenging himself and giving his all.

It's The Ring's pleasure to honor him in this special issue. Enjoy the memories.

AL BELLO

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

BY TOM GRAY

JULIAN FINNEY/GETTY IMAGES

OLEKSANDR USYK

"Usyk isn't big enough!"

"Usyk doesn't hit hard enough!"

"Usyk doesn't look good at heavyweight!"

A lot of the pre-fight commentary heading into Anthony Joshua's title defense against former undisputed cruiserweight champion Oleksandr Usyk hadn't aged well by the time the pair had duked it out over 12 rounds at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London on September 25.

Usyk (19-0, 13 knockouts) was below par in his two prior outings against bigger men. He looked flat and disinterested against Chazz Witherspoon before scoring a seventh-round stoppage over the American in October 2019. And the following year, British veteran Derek Chisora was a lot more competitive than many expected before dropping a unanimous decision.

Joshua would be levels above.

But when the bell rang for the opening round of another lavish AJ stadium fight, it was Usyk who immediately sought the psychological edge. The Ukrainian lefty knew he'd been written off due to his lack of size and power,

Former undisputed cruiserweight king claimed three recognized world title belts in London.

Pictured left to right: Shanil Mosley Jr., Fernando "El Feroz" Vargas, Diego Magdaleno

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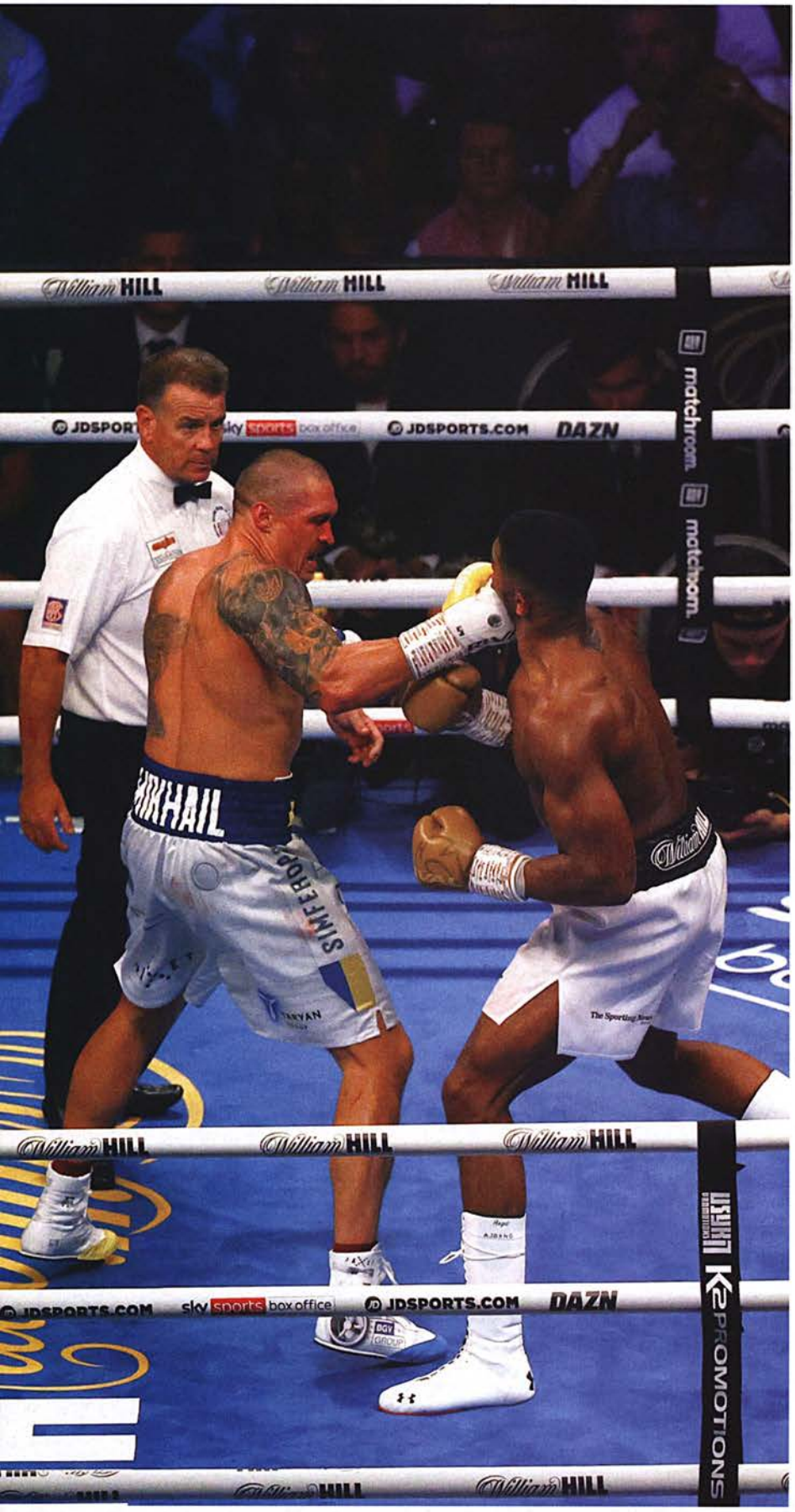

Usyk consistently beat Joshua to the punch.

ADRIAN DENNIS/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

so the first thing he did was send a message. A sharp left hand down the middle scored flush. Then another. Then another. From ringside, you could literally see Joshua's eyes widen.

The challenger took control of the fight, dictated the tempo – which was fast – and built up a meaningful lead in front of a 68,000-strong partisan crowd. Joshua wasn't being completely dominated, but he was shaken up in the third and seventh rounds, and his own much-ballyhooed punch power was having no effect.

Joshua needed a huge finish, but it was all Usyk in the championship rounds. The experience gained from 350 amateur fights and an impeccable cruiserweight crusade has shaped a fighter who is adept at turning the screw at the right time. In the closing seconds of this bout, Joshua was perilously close to a second stoppage defeat instead of the 12-round unanimous decision that went against him.

The defending champion actually fought well in spots. Usyk was forever the moving target: feints, footwork, head movement, changing levels. Joshua is unaccustomed to that kind of puzzle. His precision punching works extremely well against modern-day heavies who lack Usyk's finesse and ring craft. But even then, Joshua still rammed home some significant head-busting shots. The evidence was all over the new unified champion's face in the form of a laceration over his right eye and deep bruising.

It was never going to be easy, but Usyk sent shockwaves through the boxing world with a historic and brilliantly crafted triumph. RING

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JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

THE HARDER THEY FALL AND MORE

Budd Schulberg was a devoted fan of boxing. Among the thoughts he shared were:

* "I've never lost that feeling about going to the big fights. There aren't as many magic matches now as there used to be. But every once in a while, there is a feeling just before a fight starts that it will change the fighters' lives and define them for the rest of their lives; that it has the potential to destroy either man or make him a legend."

* "As much as I love boxing, I hate it. And as much as I hate it, I love it."

* "I know a good thing when I see it. Fistfighting is a good thing. Every great fight is a rare nugget. If our civilization is indeed declining and if it finally falls, it will not be because Joe Louis clobbered Max Schmeling or took the measure of Billy Conn."

Schulberg is best known to boxing fans for his 1954 Academy-Award-winning screenplay *On the Waterfront* and the immortal words spoken by Marlon Brando as Terry Malloy: "I coulda been a contender." *On the Waterfront* unfolds against the backdrop of corruption on the New York City docks. Seven years earlier, Schulberg authored a novel about corruption in boxing entitled *The Harder They Fall.*

RKO bought film rights to *The Harder They Fall* before the book was published. It planned to cast Robert Mitchum and Joseph Cotten in the lead roles, but that never came to pass. Columbia Pictures bought rights to the property in 1955. One year later, it released *The Harder They Fall* with Humphrey Bogart and Rod Steiger in the pivotal roles. Viewed through the prism of time, the film remains one of the best ever about the seamy underside of boxing.

Bogart plays Eddie Willis, an aging sportswriter in need of a job. Steiger is Nick Benko, a mobbed-up promoter who hires Eddie to oversee a publicity campaign to build interest in Toro Moreno – a giant of a man and thoroughly inept fighter from Argentina whom Benko is navigating toward a title shot through a series of fixed fights.

How inept is Moreno? After seeing him spar for the first time, Willis notes, "A powder-puff punch and a glass jaw. That's a great combination." But as Eddie tells his wife (played by Jan Sterling), "A newspaper job only pays a living. I want a bank account."

When sportswriter and longtime friend Art Leavitt (Harold J. Stone) questions Eddie about his involvement with Benko, Eddie responds, "You never played ball with promoters who bought advertising in your newspapers? You did it because you were a nobody. You were afraid you'd lose your job. Now you're a big man. You don't have to lie to hold your job. Well, I do. You think I took this job because I like it?"

Two former heavyweight champions have key roles in the film. Jersey Joe Walcott plays the mononymous George, a trainer who works with some of Benko's fighters. Max Baer is cast in the role of heavyweight champion Buddy Brannen, who Moreno fights in the film's climactic battle.

Moreno is played by Mike Lane – a 6-foot-8, 275-pound professional wrestler who was making his film debut and, in later years, carved out a respectable career as an actor in feature films and television. Moreno isn't supposed to be able to fight. So the fact that Lane looks clumsy and amateurish in fight scenes isn't a problem.

After *The Harder They Fall* was released, former heavyweight champion Primo Carnera sued Columbia for $1.5 million, claiming that the character of Toro Moreno was based on him (which it was). The case was dismissed on grounds that the film didn't violate Carnera's rights. Years later, Schulberg acknowledged in an interview with Daily Variety that Eddie Willis was based on journalist and press agent Harold Conrad. Unlike Carnera, Conrad was pleased with the film.

For most of the movie, Eddie wrestles with his conscience and wins that matchup. But in the end, he redeems himself. Eddie is suffering. And in the real world, Bogart was too.

Bogart had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer in early 1956. He died on January 14, 1957. Eddie Willis was his final film role.

At the end of the film, Toro Moreno goes into the ring to face Buddy Brannen and meet his destiny. His self-delusions have been erased. Eddie has told him the truth: "You're not even a tenth-rate fighter. You're what they call a bum. Any saloon fighter could wipe the floor with you." Prior to the Brannen fight, Eddie and George urge Moreno to use his reach to fight at a distance and stay down when the inevitable happens and he's knocked to the canvas. But Moreno doesn't stay down. Despite being brutalized, he gets up again and again and absorbs a horrific beating before being counted out.

"Why did he take that beating?" Eddie asks George afterward. "Why didn't he fight like you told him to?"

"Some guys can sell out," George answers. "And other guys just can't."

Reviewing *The Harder They Fall,* The New York Times declared, "It's a brutal and disagreeable story."

That's true of many great movies. And this one has Bogart and Steiger.

★ ★ ★

More on Max Baer, Primo Carnera and the movies.

On November 10, 1933, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer released *The Prizefighter and the Lady.* The plot is simple. Belle Mercer (played by Myrna Loy) is mobster Willie Ryan's woman and sings in his nightclub. She meets Steve Morgan (a bartender in a lesser establishment) when he helps her out after a car crash. They fall in love and marry after their first date. Steve (played by Baer) then segues seamlessly from fighting in bars to succeeding as a professional boxer. But he's a profligate womanizer and not at all discreet about it.

Belle leaves Steve and goes back to Willie, although she still loves Steve. Steve then dumps his loyal manager (played by Walter Huston) and eventually gets a title shot against heavyweight champion Primo Carnera (played by none other than Primo Carnera). Jack Dempsey does double duty under his own name as both the promoter and referee for the title fight. There's a nice moment when James Jeffries and Jess Willard in cameo roles are introduced in the ring just prior to the championship bout.

Carnera dominates the action in the early going and knocks Steve down seven times. Then Steve's former manager forces his way

STEVE SPATAFORE; (RIGHT) ALEX MENENDEZ

into the corner to give advice, and Belle (who has never stopped loving Steve) signals her affection from the crowd. This revitalizes Steve, who proceeds to score seven knockdowns of his own. The fight ends in a draw, after which Steve and Belle are reunited. Steve is so obnoxious at times that viewers could be forgiven for rooting for Carnera.

The Prizefighter and the Lady was marketed as a mix of romance, drama and comedy. The promotional campaign proclaimed, "He was a champion in the making – and always on the make. Women have a new heart thrill coming to them. Men, a new idol." The plot is superficial. None of the characters has depth with the possible exception of Willie Ryan (played by Otto Kruger). And the film engages in cheap body-shaming for laughs when the blow-by-blow radio commentator tells listeners prior to the climactic fight that, among the celebrities at ringside, singer Kate Smith is "sitting in seats one, two and three."

The movie marked the film debut for both Baer and Carnera. Carnera was the real heavyweight champion at the time. Initially, he balked at any involvement with the project because the original screenplay called for Steve to win the climactic championship bout. To satisfy Carnera, the script was changed so the fight ended in a draw.

History sometimes imitates art – or comes close to it. In Baer's next real fight – at Madison Square Garden on June 14, 1934 – he fought Carnera and knocked him out in the 11th round to claim the heavyweight crown. But he lost the title to James Braddock in his first defense and never fought for the heavyweight championship again.

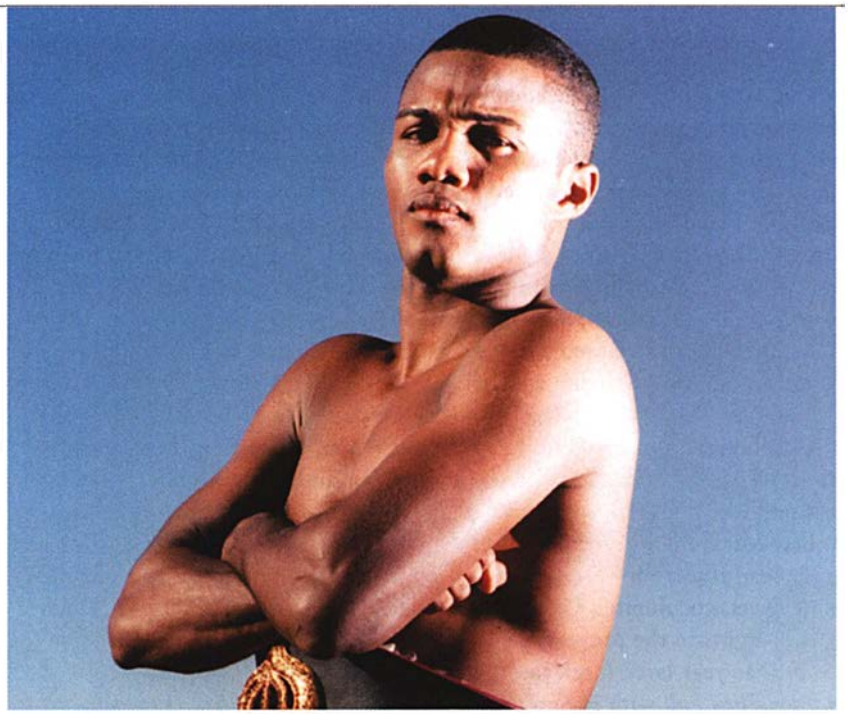
Boxing trivia buffs will be interested to know that Baer wore his robe from *The Prizefighter and the Lady* with the name "Steve Morgan" emblazoned on the back for his two real championship fights against Carnera and Braddock.

★ ★ ★

There were great boxers from Puerto Rico before Felix Trinidad and there have been great ones since. Carlos Ortiz, Jose Torres, Wilfred Benitez, Wilfredo Gomez, Hector Camacho and Edwin Rosario are all enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Someday soon, Miguel Cotto will join them. But Felix Trinidad, who was inducted into the hall in 2014, has a unique distinction. He was revered in his homeland as a matinee idol.

Fighters develop an image in the public mind. Torres was an "intellectual" because of his association with Norman Mailer and other writers. Camacho went from playful bad boy to out-of-control bad boy as his life spiralled downward.

Trinidad, like his Hall of Fame brethren, was a blood-and-guts warrior. But he has a special place in Puerto Rican hearts. Cotto was a worker who fans could envision themselves standing beside on a factory assembly line. Felix – with his good looks, charisma and the twinkle in his eye – was a man who girls dreamed of marrying.



Felix "Tito" Trinidad circa 2000.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Broken Dreams: Inside Another Year Inside Boxing – was just published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, he was selected for boxing's highest honor — induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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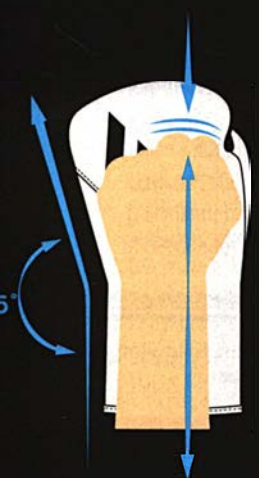

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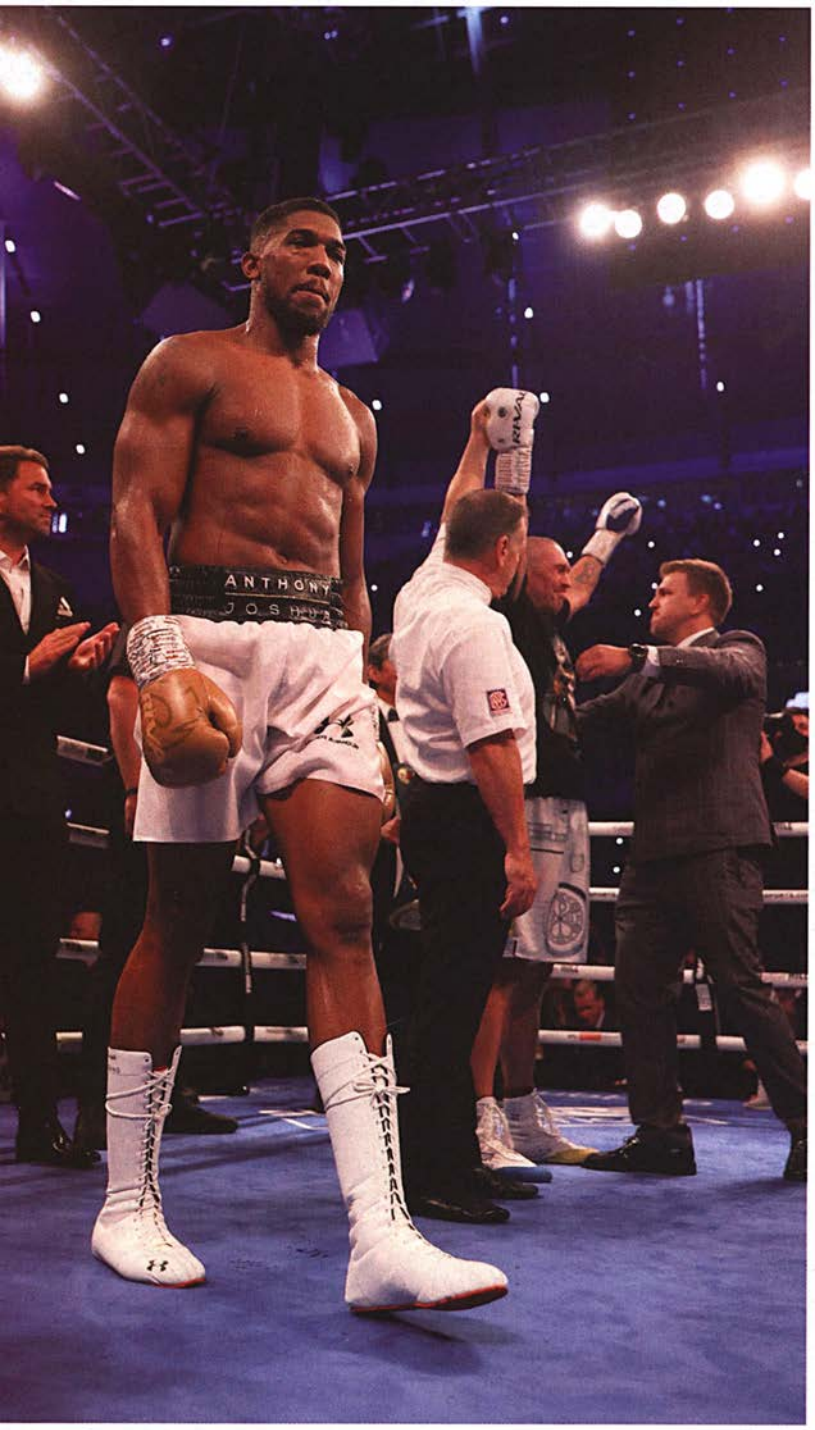
RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of October 16, 2021

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY DIEGO MORILLA



Ex-champion Joshua was crestfallen following his second defeat in a 26-bout career.

JULIAN FINNEY

POUND FOR POUND: Oleksandr Usyk's unanimous decision victory over Anthony Joshua was deemed impressive enough by the Ring Ratings Panel that it not only propelled the former unified cruiserweight champion into position as the magazine's No. 1 heavyweight, behind only Ring champ Tyson Fury, but also sparked a debate about having the new unified IBF/WBA/WBO titleholder unseat Canelo Alvarez atop the pound-for-pound rankings. In the end, Usyk (19-0, 13 KOs; rated No. 4 last month) only managed to reach the No. 2 spot right behind Alvarez, but it is clear that he has more than enough supporters to reach the top after a few more fights.

On the other side of the "heavyweights in the pound-for-pound ranking" debate, it was a completely different story.

After countless insults and accusations, two awkward ring walks, five knockdowns, and 11 sloppy but entertaining rounds, Ring/WBC champion Tyson Fury and No. 3-rated heavyweight Deontay Wilder put a glorious end to an emotional trilogy. But as commanding and dominant as Fury's performance was, in the end it wasn't enough to convince the panel that the "Gypsy King" deserved recognition as one of the game's top pound-for-pound practitioners of the manly art. Several arguments were offered, from the "eye factor" to quality of opposition to the limited number of styles that Fury has faced up to this moment in his career. But in the end, and as razor-thin as the vote was, there was no place for Mr. Fury in the mythical rankings.

HEAVYWEIGHT: Usyk's mild upset in his win against England's Joshua (24-2, 22 KOs) promoted the Ukrainian former undisputed cruiserweight king from No. 10 to the magazine's No. 1-rated heavyweight. On the other front, Fury's hard-fought 11th-round KO of archrival Deontay Wilder, in what has been hailed as an instant classic and an all-time great heavyweight slugfest, did not affect Wilder's standing, and the "Bronze Bomber" held on to his No. 3 spot in spite of the brutal loss that he endured.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Mairis Briedis lifted his Ring championship belt in his homeland of Latvia for what he claims is the last time in a while after demolishing Germany's Artur Mann (unrated) in three rounds, as he

prepares to embark on a barnstorming tour of Europe and the U.S. looking for bigger paydays (at cruiserweight and possibly heavyweight if the opportunity presents itself). Lawrence Okolie remains at No. 3 following his third-round KO of unrated Dilan Prasovic.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: After a mild resistance by a few members of the panel, Callum Smith entered at No. 10 following his second-round KO of usually durable former title challenger Lenin Castillo.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Smith's exit opened a vacancy for Christian Mbilli (19-0, 18 KOs) to enter at No. 10. Both Evgeny Shevdenko and Vladimir Shishkin were suggested by members of the panel, but in the end it was Mbilli who got the nod by the smallest of margins.

WELTERWEIGHT: He has entered and left more divisions than anyone else in Ring history, perhaps, but this time feels different: This time is for real. Following his loss to Yordenis Ugas and his subsequent retirement on Sept. 29, Senator Manny Pacquiao exits the rankings one last time. David Avanesyan (28-3-1, 16 KOs), the European champ currently on a five-bout KO streak against solid opposition, enters at No. 10.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: This is a division that saw some great action during the beginning of the fall season in the Northern Hemisphere. The resulting reshuffling was quite intense.

First, in a terrific duel between two Japanese fighters, Masamichi Yabuki dramatically jumped from No. 10 to No. 3 after scoring a stunning upset in a 10th-round stoppage of No. 1-rated Kenshiro Teraji, who dropped to No. 4.

Two weeks later, the classic Puerto Rico vs. Mexico rivalry resulted in another drastic move, as Mexico's Elwin Soto lost a spirited 12-round split decision to Puerto Rico's Jonathan "Bomba" Gonzalez. Soto was then dropped from No. 2 to No. 6, and Gonzalez entered at No. 4. Unbeaten southpaw sensation Jesse Rodriguez moved up from No. 7 to No. 5 as well after stopping Jose Alejandro Burgos (unrated) in four rounds.

All of these moves came at the expense of South Africa's Sivenathi Nontshinga, who departs the rankings for the time being, dropping out of his now-former No. 10 spot to make room for these changes.

STRAWWEIGHT: Knockout CP Freshmart remained at No. 1 after defending his WBA title with a third-round stoppage of unrated Siridech Deebook.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ** — Mexico • 56-1-2 (38 KOs)
2. **OLEKSANDR USYK** — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
3. **NAOYA INOUE** — Japan • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
4. **TERENCE CRAWFORD** — U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
5. **JOSH TAYLOR** — U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
6. **ERROL SPENCE JR.** — U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
7. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** — U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
8. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** — Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
9. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO** — Ukraine • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)
10. **KAZUTO IOKA** — Japan • 27-2-0 (15 KOs)

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC — U.K. • 31-0-1 (22 KOs)
- 1 **OLEKSANDR USYK** IBF, WBA, WBO — Ukraine • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 2 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** — U.K. • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **DEONTAY WILDER** — U.S. • 42-2-1 (41 KOs)
- 4 **DILLIAN WHYTE** — U.K. • 28-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 5 **JOSEPH PARKER** — New Zealand • 29-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.** — U.S. • 34-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **LUIS ORTIZ** — Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAEL HUNTER** — U.S. • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 9 **OSCAR RIVAS** — Colombia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 10 **JOE JOYCE** — U.K. • 13-0-0 (12 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF — Latvia • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS** — Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC — Congo • 28-2-0 (25 KOs)
- 3 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE** WBO — U.K. • 17-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **THABISO MCHUNU** — S. Africa • 23-5-0 (13 KOs)
- 5 **KEVIN LERENA** — S. Africa • 26-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI** — Poland • 31-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 7 **ALEKSEI PAPIN** — Russia • 13-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAL CIESLAK** — Poland • 21-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 9 **MATEUSZ MASTERNAK** — Poland • 45-5-0 (30 KOs)
- 10 **RYAD MERHY** — Belgium • 30-1-0 (25 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC — Russia • 16-0-0 (16 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA — Russia • 18-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **JOE SMITH JR.** — U.S. • 27-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 4 **BADOU JACK** — Sweden • 24-3-3 (14 KOs)
- 5 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ** — Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **MARCUS BROWNE** — U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 7 **MAXIM VLASOV** — Russia • 45-4-0 (26 KOs)
- 8 **LYNDON ARTHUR** — U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 9 **GILBERTO RAMIREZ** — Mexico • 42-0-0 (28 KOs)
- 10 **CALLUM SMITH** — U.K. • 28-1-0 (20 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA, WBC, WBO — Mexico • 56-1-2 (38 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ** — U.S. • 24-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** IBF — U.S. • 21-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** — U.K. • 30-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 4 **ANTHONY DIRRELL** — U.S. • 33-2-2 (24 KOs)
- 5 **JOHN RYDER** — U.K. • 30-5-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **DAVID LEMIEUX** — Canada • 43-4-0 (36 KOs)
- 7 **DANIEL JACOBS** — U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)
- 8 **FEDOR CHUDINOV** — Russia • 25-2-1 (17 KOs)
- 9 **CARLOS GONGORA** — Ecuador • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 10 **CHRISTIAN MBILLI** — France • 19-0-0 (18 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kazakhstan • 41-1-1 (36 KOs)
- **2** **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 32-0-0 (22 KOs)
- **3** **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 30-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- **5** **RYOTA MURATA** WBA
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **6** **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 37-0-0 (30 KOs)
- **7** **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
  Kazakhstan • 10-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **8** **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 31-2-0 (23 KOs)
- **9** **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-3-1 (18 KOs)
- **10** **FELIX CASH**
  U.K. • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- **C** **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC
  U.S. • 34-1-1 (18 KOs)
- **1** **BRIAN CASTANO** WBO
  Argentina • 17-0-2 (12 KOs)
- **2** **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (16 KOs)
- **3** **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 28-3-3 (16 KOs)
- **4** **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **5** **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (21 KOs)
- **6** **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
  U.S. • 17-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **8** **MAGOMED KURBANOV**
  Russia • 22-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **9** **CARLOS ADAMES**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-1-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **SERGIO GARCIA**
  Spain • 33-0-0 (14 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- **2** **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- **3** **YORDENIS UGAS** WBA
  Cuba • 27-4-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **VERGIL ORTIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- **7** **JARON ENNIS**
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (25 KOs)
- **8** **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
  Lithuania • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **DAVID AVANESYAN**
  Russia • 28-3-1 (16 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- **C** **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
- **1** **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (22 KOs)
- **2** **JOSE RAMIREZ**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 34-2-0 (26 KOs)
- **4** **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **GERVONTA DAVIS**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (24 KOs)
- **7** **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
  Puerto Rico • 17-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **8** **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **9** **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 20-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **BATYR AKHMEDOV**
  Russia • 9-1-0 (8 KOs)

Tyson Fury knocked out Deontay Wilder in 11 rounds to maintain his status as heavyweight champion. Wilder stayed put at No. 3.

Heavyweight Oleksandr Usyk upset Anthony Joshua to move directly behind Fury at No. 1. Joshua falls to No. 2.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- **C** **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, IBF, WBA, WBO
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **1** **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 15-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **2** **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **3** **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 30-3-0 (27 KOs)
- **5** **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.**
  U.S. • 32-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **6** **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-6-0 (29 KOs)
- **7** **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-3-1 (25 KOs)
- **8** **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **9** **ISAAC CRUZ**
  Mexico • 22-1-1 (15 KOs)
- **10** **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
  Mexico • 23-0-0 (21 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

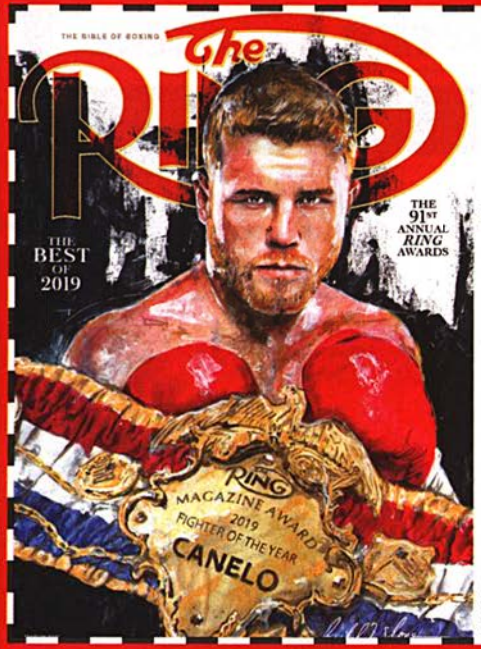
- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 23-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **2** **MIGUEL BERCHELT**
  Mexico • 38-2-0 (34 KOs)
- **3** **SHAVKATDZHON RAKHIMOV**
  Russia • 15-0-1 (12 KOs)
- **4** **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **6** **ROGER GUTIERREZ**
  Venezuela • 26-3-1 (20 KOs)
- **7** **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
  U.S. • 18-2-0 (11 KOs)
- **8** **XAVIER MARTINEZ**
  U.S. • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **AZINGA FUZILE**
  South Africa • 15-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **10** **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
  Brazil • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 35-1-0 (29 KOs)
- **2** **KID GALAHAD** IBF
  U.K. • 28-1-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **MAURICIO LARA**
  Mexico • 23-2-1 (16 KOs)
- **4** **JOSH WARRINGTON**
  U.K. • 30-1-1 (7 KOs)
- **5** **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 23-0-0 (16 KOs)
- **6** **LEIGH WOOD**
  U.K. • 25-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **7** **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-2-0 (9 KOs)
- **8** **XU CAN**
  China • 18-3-0 (3 KOs)
- **9** **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **10** **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-2-0 (14 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- **C** (VACANT)
- **1** **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
- **2** **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 29-3-1 (10 KOs)
- **3** **STEPHEN FULTON** WBO
  U.S. • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **4** **BRANDON FIGUEROA** WBC
  U.S. • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)
- **5** **ANGELO LEO**
  U.S. • 21-1-0 (9 KOs)
- **6** **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- **7** **RAEESE ALEEM**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **8** **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **RONNY RIOS**
  U.S. • 33-3-0 (16 KOs)
- **10** **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-4-0 (17 KOs)



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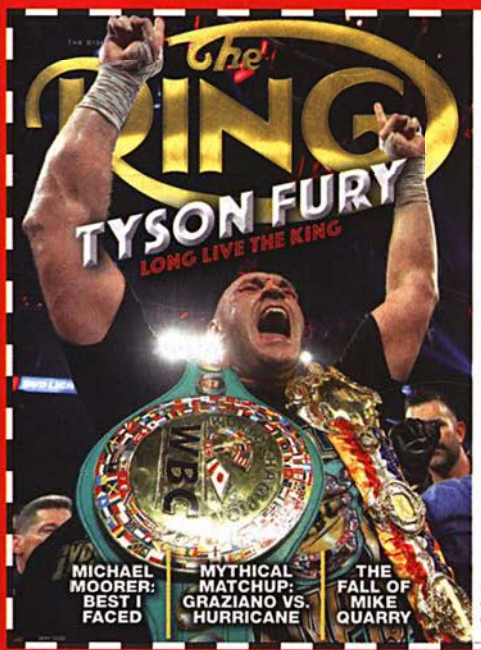

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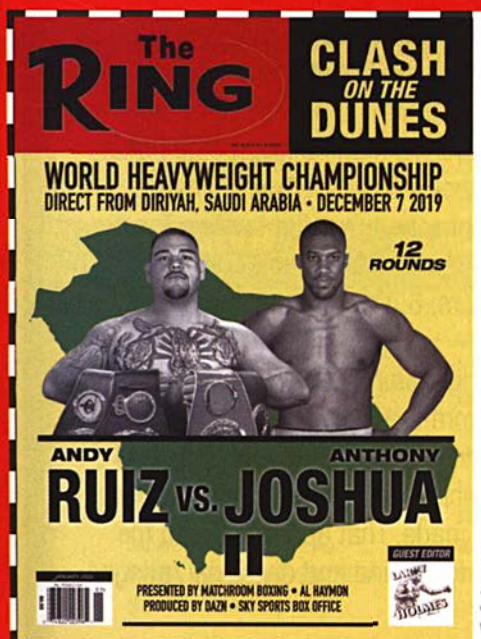

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BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

- **C** **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
  Japan • 21-0-0 (18 KOs)
- **1** **NONITO DONAIRE** WBC
  Phil. • 41-6-0 (27 KOs)
- **2** **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
  Phil. • 31-4-0 (21 KOs)
- **3** **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
  Puerto Rico • 19-2-0 (12 KOs)
- **4** **NORDINE OUBAALI**
  France • 17-1-0 (12 KOs)
- **5** **JASON MOLONEY**
  Australia • 22-2-0 (18 KOs)
- **6** **TAKUMA INOUE**
  Japan • 14-1-0 (3 KOs)
- **7** **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
  Cuba • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **8** **RAU'SHEE WARREN**
  U.S. • 19-3-0 (5 KOs)
- **9** **GARY ANTONIO RUSSELL**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)
- **10** **LEE MCGREGOR**
  U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

- **C** **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBA, WBC
  Mexico • 42-3-0 (28 KOs)
- **1** **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
  Thailand • 50-5-1 (43 KOs)
- **2** **ROMAN GONZALEZ**
  Nicaragua • 50-3-0 (41 KOs)
- **3** **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
  Japan • 27-2-0 (15 KOs)
- **4** **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
  Phil. • 33-1-2 (22 KOs)
- **5** **JOSHUA FRANCO**
  U.S. • 18-1-2 (8 KOs)
- **6** **CARLOS CUADRAS**
  Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)
- **7** **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
  Mexico • 34-5-1 (24 KOs)
- **8** **DONNIE NIETES**
  Phil. • 43-1-5 (23 KOs)
- **9** **ANDREW MOLONEY**
  Australia • 21-2-0 (14 KOs)
- **10** **PEDRO GUEVARA**
  Mexico • 37-3-1 (22 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
  Mexico • 18-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **2** **JUNTO NAKATANI** WBO
  Japan • 22-0-0 (17 KOs)
- **3** **SUNNY EDWARDS** IBF
  U.K. • 16-0-0 (4 KOs)
- **4** **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
  Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)
- **5** **MORUTI MTHALANE**
  S. Africa • 39-3-0 (26 KOs)
- **6** **RICARDO SANDOVAL**
  U.S. • 19-1-0 (14 KOs)
- **7** **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
  Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)
- **8** **MCWILLIAMS ARROYO**
  Puerto Rico • 21-4-0 (16 KOs)
- **9** **JACKSON CHAUKE**
  S. Africa • 20-1-1 (14 KOs)
- **10** **RYOTA YAMAUCHI**
  Japan • 8-1-0 (7 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

- **C** **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
  Japan • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **1** **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
  Nicaragua • 37-2-0 (32 KOs)
- **2** **MASAMICHI YABUKI** WBC
  Japan • 13-3-0 (12 KOs)
- **3** **KENSHIRO TERAJI**
  Japan • 18-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **4** **JONATHAN GONZALEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 25-3-1 (14 KOs)
- **5** **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
  U.S. • 14-0-0 (10 KOs)
- **6** **ELWIN SOTO**
  Mexico • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)
- **7** **HEKKIE BUDLER**
  S. Africa • 33-4-0 (10 KOs)
- **8** **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
  Argentina • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)
- **9** **ESTEBAN BERMUDEZ**
  Mexico • 14-3-2 (10 KOs)
- **10** **DANIEL MATELLON**
  Cuba • 12-0-2 (6 KOs)

Lawrence Okolie retained his No. 3 spot at 200 pounds with a comfortable third-round stoppage of unrated Dilan Prasovic.

Jonathan Gonzalez moves up to No. 4 at 108 pounds following an upset points win over Elwin Soto who drops to No. 6.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

- **C** **(VACANT)**
- **1** **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
  Thailand • 22-0-0 (8 KOs)
- **2** **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
  Thailand • 36-1-0 (23 KOs)
- **3** **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
  Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)
- **4** **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
  Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)
- **5** **VIC SALUDAR**
  Phil. • 21-4-0 (11 KOs)
- **6** **RENE MARK CUARTO** IBF
  Phil. • 19-2-2 (11 KOs)
- **7** **PEDRO TADURAN**
  Phil. • 14-3-1 (11 KOs)
- **8** **MASATAKA TANIGUCHI**
  Japan • 14-3-0 (9 KOs)
- **9** **GINJIRO SHIGEOKA**
  Japan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)
- **10** **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
  Phil. • 17-2-0 (10 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Oct. 16, 2021

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
Ireland • 19-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 41-1-1 (30 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 45-3-0 (18 KOs)

6 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)

7 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)

8 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)

9 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)

10 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 7-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
5 **SHADASIA GREEN**
U.S. • 8-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 26-1-0 (12 KOs)
3 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 21-0-1 (11 KOs)
4 **FEMKE HERMANS**
Belgium • 12-3-0 (5 KOs)
5 **ALMA IBARRA**
Mexico • 9-1-0 (4 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, WBC, WBO, IBF
U.S. • 11-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE**
Canada • 17-1-0 (0 KOs)
2 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)
3 **HANNAH RANKIN**
U.K. • 10-5-0 (2 KOs)
4 **CYNTHIA LOZANO**
Mexico • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 **AIDYL CARDENAS**
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **JESSICA MCCASKILL** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-2-0 (3 KOs)
1 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-2-0 (9 KOs)
2 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
3 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
4 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 21-6-0 (0 KOs)
5 **LOLITA MUZEYA**
Zambia • 16-1-0 (8 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 14-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-5-0 (10 KOs)
4 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 18-7-1 (5 KOs)
5 **ANAHI SANCHEZ**
Argentina • 20-5-0 (12 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
Ireland • 19-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 45-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 9-0-0 (1 KOs)
3 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
4 **NATASHA JONAS**
U.K. • 9-2-1 (7 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN**
U.S. • 18-4-1 (18 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 15-0-0 (5 KOs)
2 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
3 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 22-1-0 (18 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 19-0-1 (5 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 20-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBC, WBO
Puerto Rico • 41-1-1 (30 KOs)
2 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
3 **ERIKA CRUZ HERNANDEZ** WBA
Mexico • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)
4 **JELENA MRDJENOVICH**
Canada • 41-11-2 (19 KOs)
5 **NINA MEINKE**
Germany • 12-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 38-4-4 (16 KOs)
2 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YAMILETH MERCADO** WBC
Mexico • 18-3-0 (5 KOs)
4 **SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE**
France • 14-0-0 (1 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-10-4 (19 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 53-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 22-3-1 (4 KOs)
3 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 55-10-4 (19 KOs)
4 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-5-1 (0 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 16-0-0 (6 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 32-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **YESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 32-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 24-4-1 (4 KOs)
5 **ADELAIDA RUIZ**
U.S. • 10-0-1 (5 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 19-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 29-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 10-1-0 (1 KOs) WBC
4 **IBETH ZAMORA**
Mexico • 32-7-0 (12 KOs)
5 **JESSICA NERY PLATA**
Mexico • 27-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBO
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 14-0-1 (4 KOs)
3 **KIM CLAVEL**
Canada • 14-0-0 (2 KOs)
4 **TSUNAMI TENKAI**
Japan • 28-13-1 (16 KOs)
5 **MARIA GUADALUPE BAUTISTA**
Mexico • 18-11-2 (3 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **SENIESA ESTRADA** WBA
U.S. • 21-0-0 (8 KOs)
2 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 11-0-1 (3 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 22-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ANABEL ORTIZ**
Mexico • 31-4-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ETSUKO TADA** WBO
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)

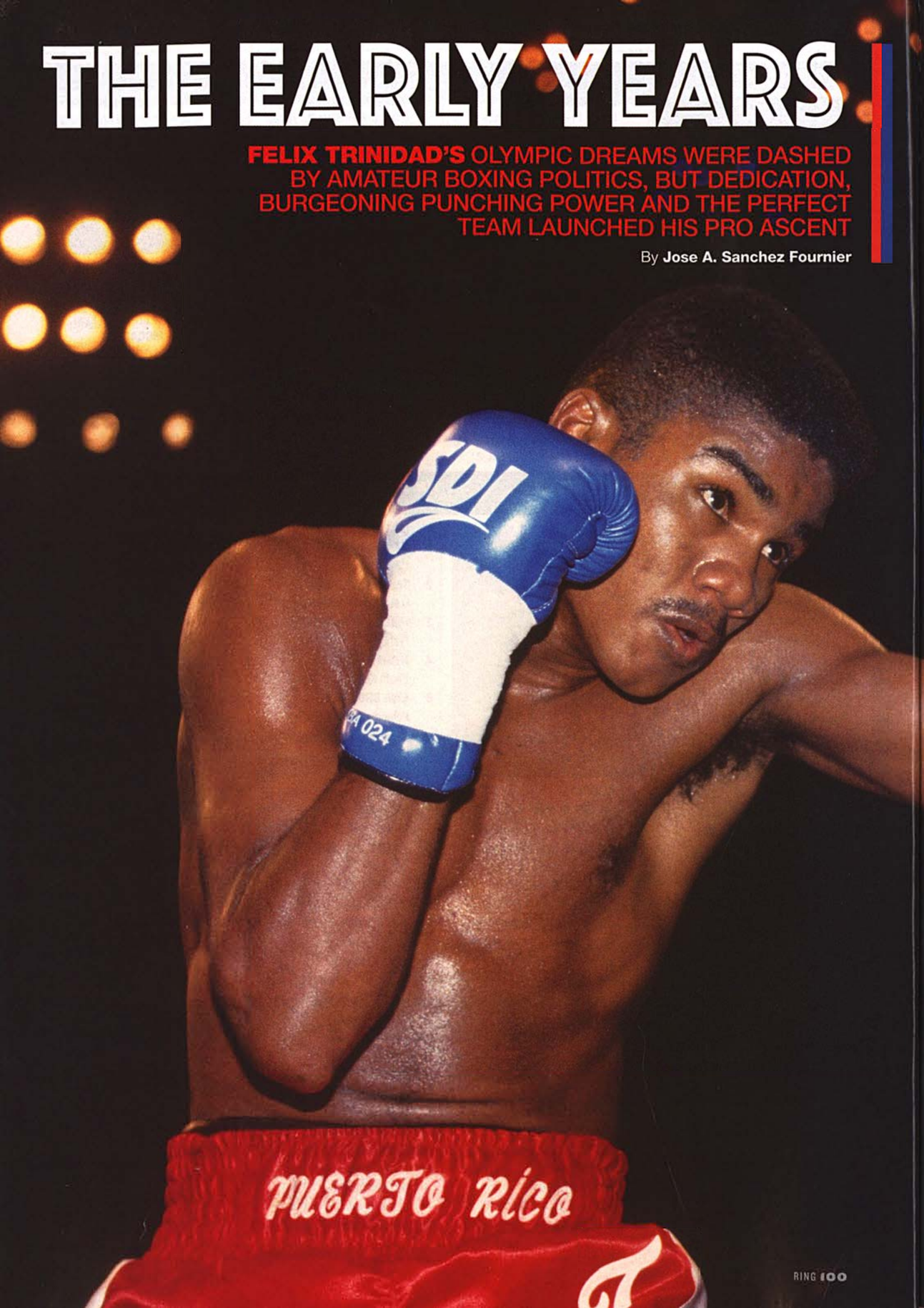
ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

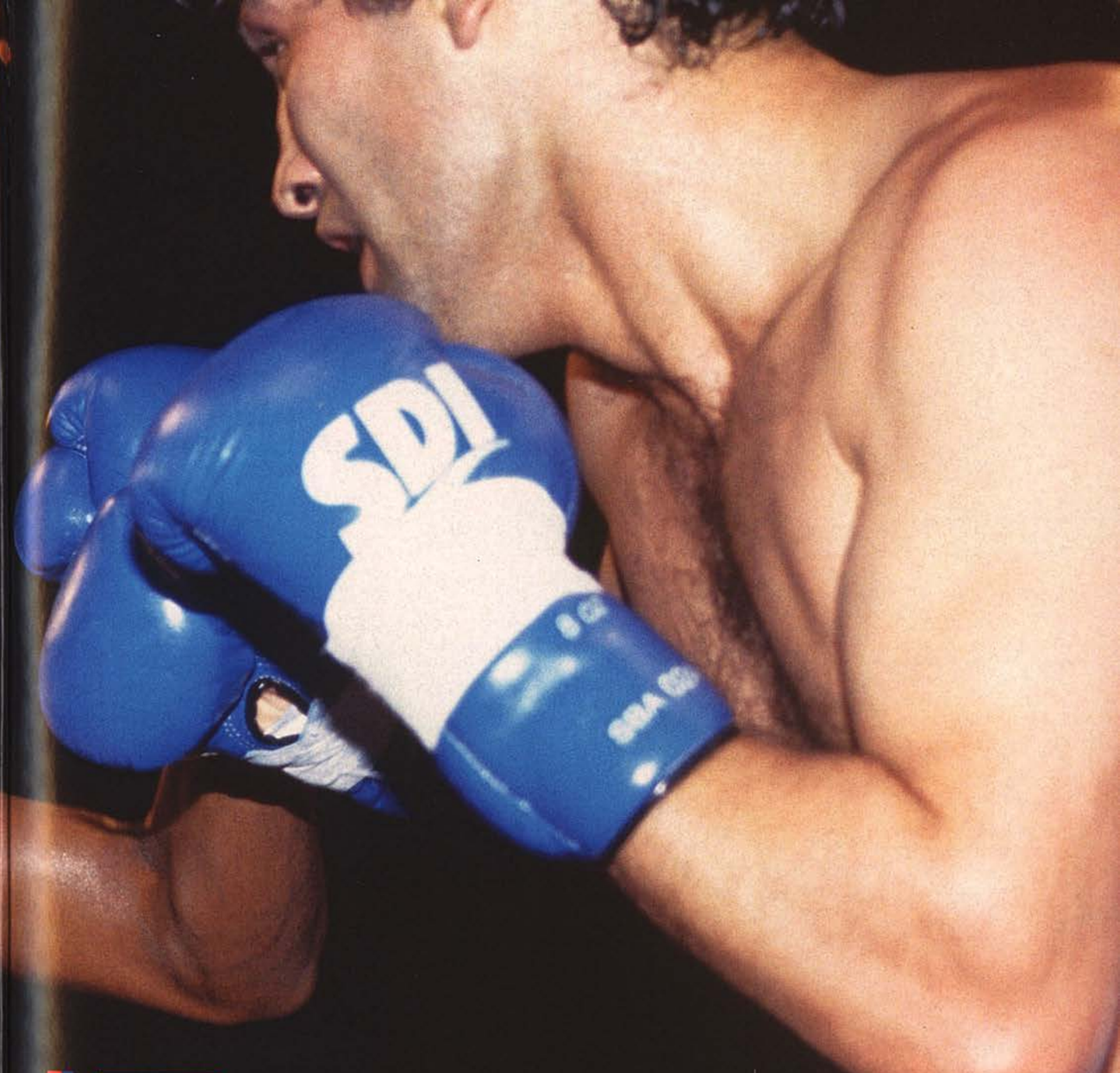
C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 16-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 18-0-1 (5 KOs)
3 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
4 **ERI MATSUDA**
Japan • 4-0-1 (1 KO)
5 **YENIFER LEON**
Venezuela • 13-3-0 (9 KOs)

THE EARLY YEARS

FELIX TRINIDAD'S OLYMPIC DREAMS WERE DASHED BY AMATEUR BOXING POLITICS, BUT DEDICATION, BURGEONING PUNCHING POWER AND THE PERFECT TEAM LAUNCHED HIS PRO ASCENT

By **Jose A. Sanchez Fournier**





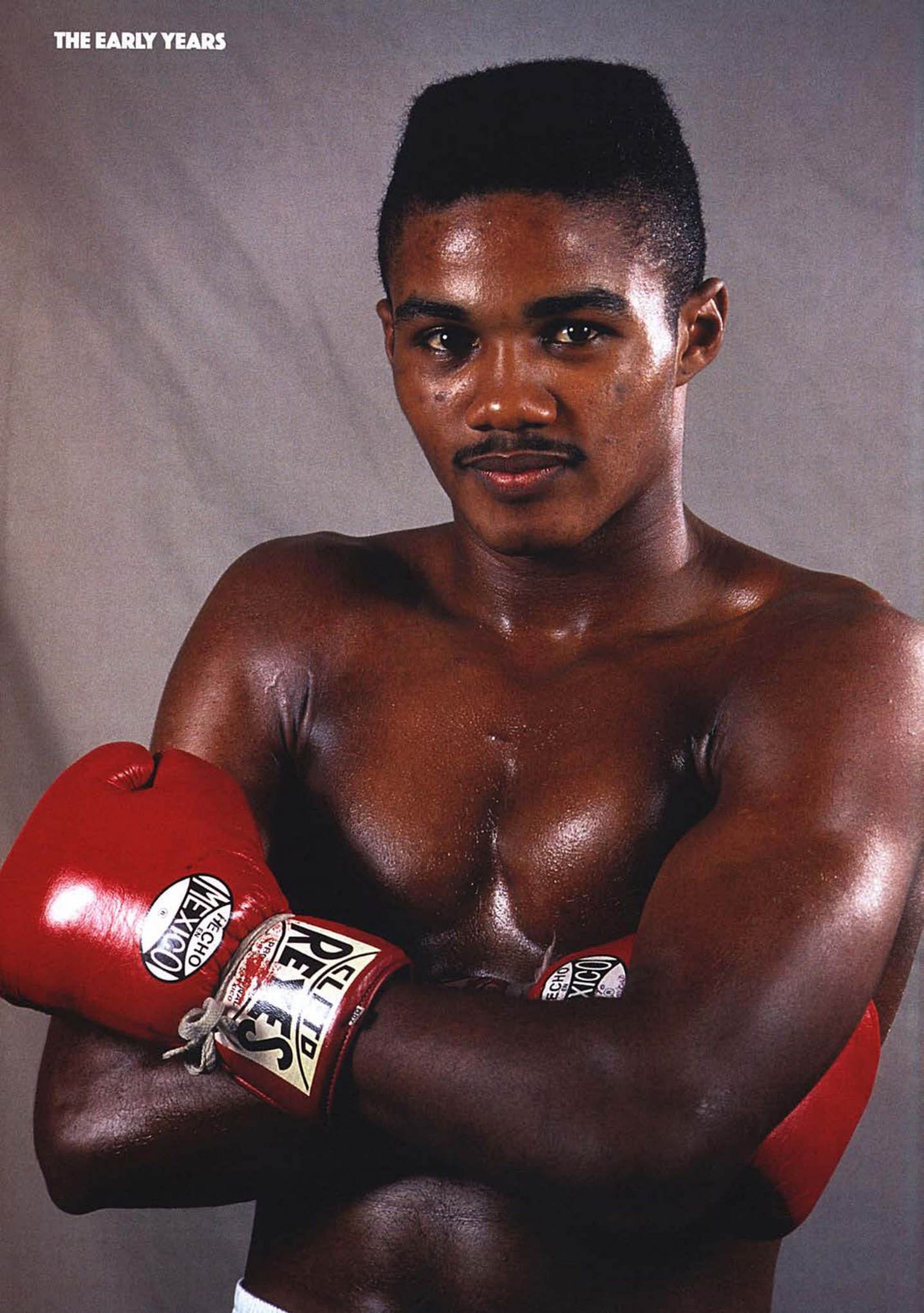
Long before he became one of Puerto Rico's greatest sports figures, Felix "Tito" Trinidad was the quiet but energetic son of Don Felix Trinidad González, a former professional fighter who made his post-boxing living as a pool contractor.

Trinidad was 12 years old when he debuted as an amateur. He quickly drew attention, not for his punching power – he only had 12 knockouts in the unpaid ranks (57-6 amateur record) – but for his solid technique and his total devotion to training and conditioning.

"I was never a good technical boxer. I started relatively late and only had about 10 amateur fights [before turning pro]," said Felix Sr., who at one time held the Puerto Rico national title at featherweight. "But I trained under Enrique 'Quique' Carrion and he taught me a lot that, even though I wasn't able to apply it personally, I was able to teach it to Tito and to some of my other boxers."

The late Carrion is a legend in the island's gyms. He taught and trained several champions, including Wilfredo "Bazooka" Gomez, who before Tito's ascent was considered hands down the greatest Puerto Rican boxer of all time.

Tito won an early admirer in veteran television sports anchor Rafael Bracero,


MEXICO
PELTZ

who joined the Trinidads in the Puerto Rican Sports Hall of Fame in 2012.

"Don Felix was building a pool in my back yard and told me about his son's early exploits. He asked me to go see him in action. [Tito] was a skinny kid with a varied offense and an ability to pressure his opponent," Bracero recalled.

The young Trinidad won a national amateur title at 100 pounds in 1985, his first year of boxing competition. He then won national titles at 112 pounds (1986), 119 pounds (1987), and 126 pounds (1988).

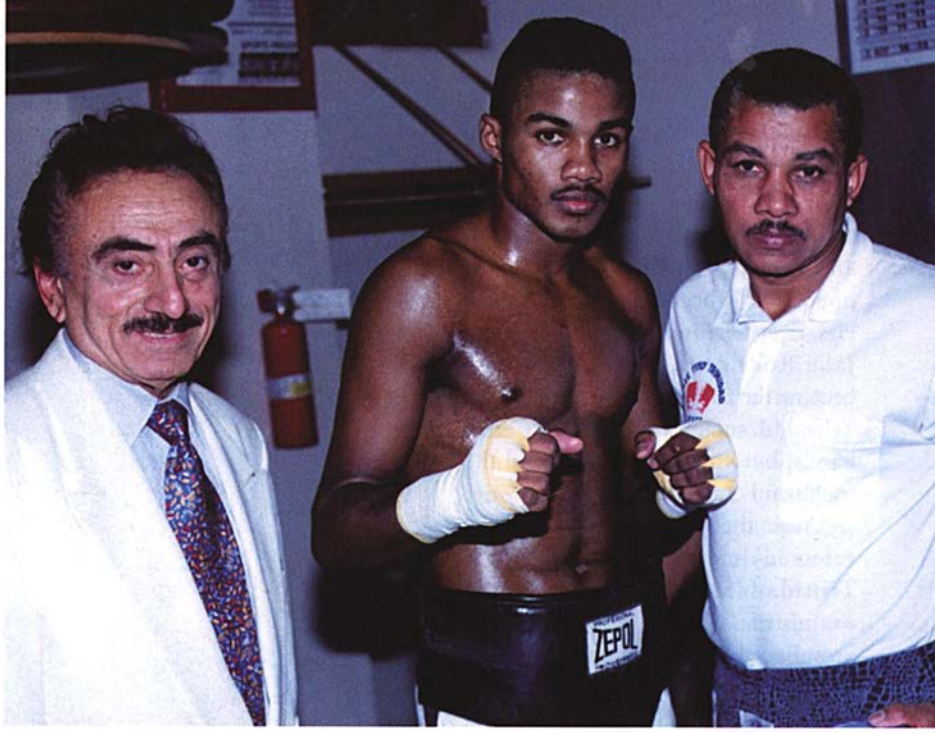
However, the first time Trinidad grabbed national headlines was not in his home island, but in Cuba, the amateur boxing superpower in the Caribbean. Then only 15 years old, Trinidad was part of the team that represented Puerto Rico in a tournament held November 23-27, 1988, in Guantanamo, Cuba. The team arrived on time at Havana, but their flight to Guantanamo, on the other side of the island, was canceled at the last minute. Their only option was to cross the island – over 560 miles – by public bus.

"The whole team had to take a 15-hour bus ride to get there just in time for the start of the tournament. And Tito had to fight that very day," recalled Jose Luis Vellon, a 1972 Olympian, trainer, and president of the Puerto Rico Amateur Boxing Federation, who was living in Cuba at the time.

Vellon joined Tito and the rest of the team for the bus ride and remembers it as a tortuous journey.

"But Tito arrived in Guantanamo, got off the bus, got into the ring and beat the Soviet boxer in his first fight that same day. The Cubans were so impressed by that feat that the next day it was in the newspaper in Cuba," Vellon said. "And the title of the story was a quote attributed to Julius Caesar: 'Veni, vidi, vici' (I came, I saw, I conquered)."

Trinidad won silver in the tourney, losing to home-country favorite Mario Kindelan, a future two-time Olympic champion, by a score of 2-1.



A prime Trinidad flanked by manager Yamil Chade and father-trainer Felix Sr. in 1994.

DASHED OLYMPIC DREAMS

The Trinidads' goal was for Tito to earn a spot on the squad that would represent Puerto Rico in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain, but amateur politics would spoil their dream.

After winning his fifth national amateur title in as many years, at 132 pounds in 1989, father and son desired a move up in weight to the 139-pound division.

Trinidad had beaten the local ruler of the junior welterweight division, Anibal Acevedo, the three times they had faced each other. Yet Angel Maldonado, the then-president of the Puerto Rico Amateur Boxing Federation, selected Acevedo over Trinidad for an important tournament to be held in Cuba, the Copa Mundo (World Cup).

"Anibal was a very good fighter," recalled Trinidad Sr. "He won gold in the 1989 Junior World Cup, beating Shane Mosley in the final. And he went on to win bronze in the Barcelona Olympics. I saw that it would be an uphill battle because we bested Acevedo three times in the ring, but they still picked him over Tito.

"So, looking to get away from those types of controversies and backroom dealings, I thought turning pro was the best move. Now I realize that I had no idea what we were getting into."

Felix Jr. turned pro on March 10, 1990.

When he thinks about the Trinidad that he saw fighting in Guantanamo over 30 years ago, Vellon cannot help but wonder how Tito would have done if he had made it to Barcelona.

"The tools that made him famous as a pro, he had them back in Guantanamo," Vellon said. "He was always in great physical condition, showed solid boxing skills and was an effective pressure boxer. He definitely would have been in contention [for an Olympic medal].

"He didn't have that many knockouts because amateur boxing wasn't conducive to them, with headgear and three rounds [back then]. But he was a solid puncher as an amateur."

FROM TECHNICAL STANDOUT TO KO ARTIST

The professional ranks were ideally suited for Tito in that respect. And this was obvious since his debut when he knocked out Angel Romero in two rounds of a fight that was part of a non-televised event held in front of a relatively small crowd in Miramar, a

borough of San Juan.

Tito won his first five fights by knockout before Valentin Ocasio survived the six-round distance and became the first of Trinidad's opponents who heard the final bell. His first serious test came versus Jake Rodriguez, who would later become the IBF 140-pound titleholder. Trinidad suffered injuries to both hands, but still soundly defeated the tough and crafty southpaw.

"After that fight, [a family friend referred] me to an orthopedist," Trinidad Sr. said. "The doctor examined Tito's hands and told me how I could wrap his hands in such a way that would give them the best possible protection against injury and still comply with the commission guidelines. It helped, because Tito never injured his hands after that."

Many on the island were impressed by the fact that, even with both hands injured, Trinidad never took his foot off the gas pedal. The triumph over Rodriguez solidified Tito's status as a well-known and promising prospect to the island's vast boxing fanbase.

Among those was the late Mario Rivera Martino, who was a correspondent for The Ring from the 1940s to the 1980s and one of Puerto Rico's most respected boxing minds. Rivera Martino would often compare Tito to one of his personal favorites: Joe Louis.

"Tito had that solid, straight up, classical boxing posture, like Louis. He also has firepower in both hands and was most dangerous when hurt," Martino said in an interview recorded in 2009. He also pointed to another similarity between Louis and Trinidad.

"Tito would leave most of the talking to his father, the same way Louis was relatively silent at his press conferences. His manager would take care of that part," said Rivera Martino, whose first assignment for The Ring was to interview the Brown Bomber during the champ's tour of military bases during World War II.

On October 3, 1992, Tito had his first scare in the ring, when he was dropped and visibly stunned by Alberto Cortes in the second round of a fight held in Paris, France. And as he did plenty of times after, Tito showed that he often was most dangerous after being knocked down or hurt.

"After Tito was dropped, he came to the corner at the end of the round and asked me, 'What should I do in the next round?' I told him, 'Mix it up, go toe-to-toe with him because he's coming to try and finish you," Trinidad Sr. recalled.

"I wasn't worried because I knew the power Tito had in his hands. I felt confident that, when Cortes came looking for the finish, Tito would take care of him.

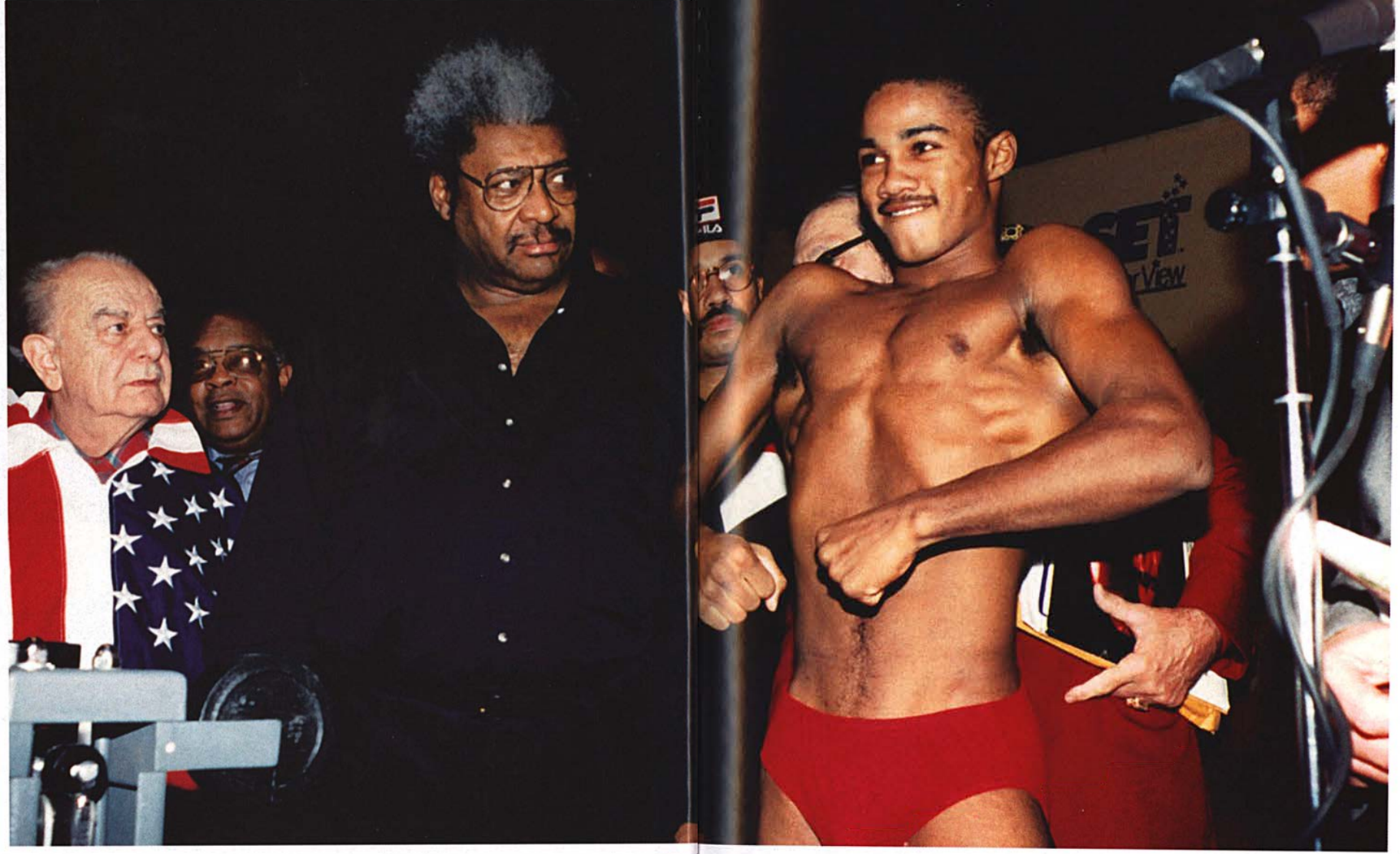
"Had it been one of my other boxers, the order probably would have been to tie Cortes up and hold until his head was clear. But with Tito's power, it was a different scenario."

Tito did as he was told and knocked Cortes out in the next round.

ANOINTED BY "BAZOOKA"

Around this time the skinny teenage contender from Caimito got the blessing of the island's boxing hero, "Bazooka" Gomez. The three-division titlist was Puerto Rico's first true boxing superstar. Handsome, well-spoken and an absolute destroyer in the ring, Gomez is adored by Puerto Ricans to this day.

He also had a peculiar link to Team Trinidad. Don Felix used to be his sparring partner when both trained under Carrion. In fact, the senior Trinidad has said that seeing up close how the supremely talented Gomez would often pay the price on fight night for cutting corners during training taught him that nothing was more important for the success of a fighter than his discipline and hard work during training.



Don King looks on as Trinidad makes the 147-pound limit, a routine that would soon become a struggle.

Gomez, who does not compliment boxers often, has said that he wishes he had Tito's discipline and drive to always give it his all in the gym.

"I would train hard, but not always. And sometimes that can be the difference between winning and losing," Gomez told The Ring. "His father was key in his success, too, because Tito had the utmost respect for him, and he would do whatever Don Felix would ask of him.

"If I had someone like Felix Senior in my corner, I would probably still be boxing," he added jokingly.

But the Trinidads were not immune to out-of-the-ring distractions. Following Tito's IBF welterweight title-winning knockout of Maurice Blocker on June 19, 1993, they were in the middle of tense contract negotiations with Don King, when the bombastic promoter offered them a last-minute engagement. It would be Tito's second title defense on October 23, 1993. The challenger was Anthony Stephens, a relatively little-known fighter with a less-than-stellar record of 19-5-2 (11 knockouts) at the time. The champion's purse was $125,000.

"We only had one month to train for that fight. We were constantly arguing with Don King (Tito's promoter) and Yamil Chade (his co-manager). And then they offered us the Stephens fight relatively late during the discussions," said Trinidad Sr. [Editor's note: The bout was originally scheduled for October 2 in Miami, according to Showtime's broadcast of the fight. The original bout was said to have been postponed because Trinidad had a cold and a minor hand injury at the time, however Showtime commentator Steve Albert stated: "We learned there was nothing wrong with his hand, he simply was not prepared," before the opening round.]

Against Stephens, Tito looked frustrated at times and took more damage than expected. Stephens dropped a clearly hurt Trinidad in Round 3 with a straight right upstairs, although it was not credited as an official knockdown by the referee. Tito made it out of the round and by Round 6 he was heaping punishment on Stephens, who he stopped in the 10th round. The Trinidads never again agreed to fight without a full training camp. They also upgraded their legal team.

"After the Stephens fight, that's when we got together with Nicolas Medina. My attorney at the time told me that he did not feel comfortable enough speaking English to deal with the contracts and the discussions we had with Don King. And he recommended that we meet with Nicolas," Trinidad Sr. said.

Medina, a Harvard Law School graduate, joined Team Trinidad shortly thereafter, serving as the final puzzle piece of the group that was with Tito for the rest of his pro career. The group included Juan "Popo" Guzman as assistant second, strength and conditioning coach Cruz Manuel "Pensa" Garcia and Dr. Bonny Munoz Zayas. Don Felix was captain and helmsman of the ship.

Team Trinidad was in place in time for the breakout year of 1994. Tito bested Hector "Macho" Camacho, Luis Ramon "Yori Boy" Campas and Oba Carr that year and his name began to appear on the pound-for-pound lists, alongside the likes of Roy Jones Jr., Julio Cesar Chávez and Pernell Whitaker.

Trinidad got to that level with no Olympic medal, only with the hard work that he put in for every single fight since he was an unknown teenager following his father's footsteps.

A FIGHT FOR STARDOM

TRINIDAD'S LONG WELTERWEIGHT REIGN BEGAN WITH A BANG, BUT IT TOOK YEARS OF BATTLING HIS OWN PROMOTER AND THE BOXING BUSINESS TO GET THE ELITE MATCHUPS HE YEARNED FOR

By **Cliff Rold**

The late Ferdie Pacheco was never shy about how much potential he saw in Felix Trinidad.

"This is a future megastar. This is another Sugar Ray Robinson," Pacheco stated on Showtime as Trinidad celebrated an eighth-round stoppage of Oba Car in December 1994. While it might have sounded hyperbolic to jaded observers that night, in retrospect it's easy to understand.

Throughout Trinidad's welterweight title reign, it was easy to get excited. He left the impression that the world was watching someone special – it was always a matter of discovering just how special. As the knockouts piled

HOLLY STEIN

Tito comes of age with a devastating knockout of then-IBF welterweight titleholder Maurice Blocker.

up, the sky was the limit.

But the fight to get as high as he could was a battle contested both in and out of the ring.

Trinidad's first five-and-a-half years as a welterweight titlist were a mixed bag reflecting both his talent in the ring and the harsh realities of the business of boxing. He found ceilings to his ambitions and fought to get past them.

It started out about as well as it could.

Trinidad followed his June 1993 two-round blowout of Maurice Blocker for the IBF title with a pair of defenses. Luis Garcia had never been stopped; Trinidad dropped him four times for a first-round knockout to notch the first defense. A sluggish start against Anthony Stephens followed. Trinidad was hurt and lucky to escape a knockdown call in the third before dishing out a one-sided beating. Stephens was halted in 10.

Then came 1994.

It began with a showdown of young and old. Trinidad, a new star for the 1990s, squared off with one of his native Puerto Rico's biggest stars of the 1980s. Hector "Macho" Camacho had dazzled as a junior lightweight beltholder, only to often puzzle after a harrowing lightweight title defense against Edwin Rosario. Past his prime, Camacho won three straight after a thrashing loss at junior welterweight to Julio Cesar Chavez in 1992.

On the undercard of Chavez's stunning first official defeat to Frankie Randall, Camacho was Trinidad's highest-profile opponent to date, and some liked Camacho's chances against his 21-year-old compatriot.

Writing for KO Magazine after the fight, Steve Farhood wrote of the perceptions going into the pay-per-view card, "Trinidad-Camacho was viewed as the only competitive bout." Oddsmaker extraordinaire Herbie Lambeck made Trinidad a 3-1 favorite and picked an upset. He wasn't alone. Lots of experts agreed with the 31-year-old Camacho, who said, "I expect Trinidad to come out and bang, but he's going to find himself in with a seasoned, unique counterpuncher. I'm not the type he's fought."

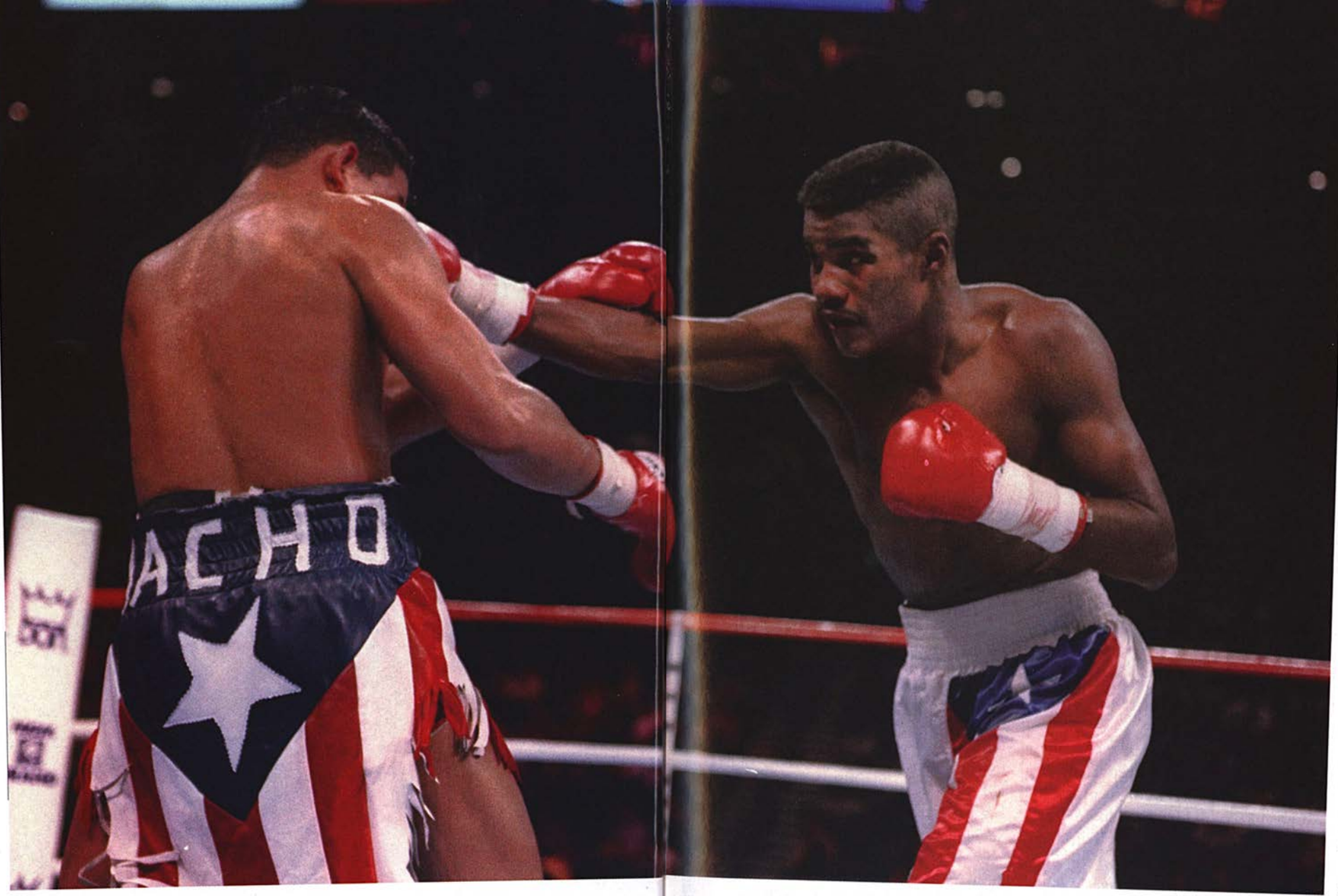
It didn't matter. Camacho would be the first to last the distance since Jake Rodriguez nine fights prior, but the veteran had no answers for the younger man. Camacho lost a point for holding as Trinidad set the sort of mounting tempo that would become his hallmark and cruised through the second half to a one-sided decision.

If only unofficially, it would mark a passing of the island's torch. Farhood's headline said it all. "Gomez ... Benitez ... Escalera ... DeJesus ... Is Felix Trinidad the Next Puerto Rican Superstar?"

Trinidad's next two title defenses would only increase the volume on the question.

Eight months after the Camacho win, Trinidad was matched with Mexico's undefeated Yori Boy Campas on the undercard of Chavez's long-awaited rematch with Meldrick Taylor. If Trinidad's talent turned heads in his previous outing, this time the young welterweight stole the show.

Campas entered the fight at 56-0 with 50 knockouts, but limited opposition left questions about the threat he would pose. Campas proved there was some substance to the numbers when a short hook dropped the champion in Round 2.



Trinidad became the official king of Puerto Rico by outpointing Hector Camacho.

Whitaker in 1994 was the near universal choice for pound-for-pound king of the sport. Trinidad was gaining ground as a potential rival and the drumbeat could only grow after Trinidad's final appearance of the year – against top contender Oba Carr.

Again Trinidad was matched with a dangerous, undefeated challenger. Again Trinidad was floored in the second round. Ferdie Pacheco wasn't throwing around the name Sugar Ray Robinson because Trinidad stayed there.

Supporting another Chavez undercard, this time for Chavez's battle with Tony "The Tiger" Lopez in December, it wouldn't be fair to say Trinidad stole the show. Fans got every cent of their money's worth on a night that also included the Ring Magazine Fight of the Year, as bloodied Jorge Castro scored a shocking come-from-behind knockout of John David Jackson in a brutal war.

Trinidad's battle with Carr wasn't far behind it for quality. Carr, just 22 years old, entered at 32-0 and was 11 indisputable wins past a highly controversial decision over veteran Livingstone Bramble earlier in his career. Bruce Williams wrote for The Ring, "The message is becoming clear: Don't wake up Trinidad by knocking him down in the second round."

A picturesque one-two put Trinidad on the seat of his trunks. Trinidad rose immediately and absorbed some additional Carr right hands before the frame was over, but he stayed up. Then Trinidad went to work. Known for a mighty left hook, Trinidad showed off the full range of his talents versus Carr. His pinpoint jab and long, accurate right hands gradually contained Carr. Seemingly stronger with each passing round, Trinidad constructed

It was the first official knockdown suffered by Trinidad as champion, and Campas soon found out what Alberto Cortes had when he decked Trinidad in 1992.

Trinidad was harder to keep down than he was to knock down. Writing for The Ring, Ron Borges described the aftermath of the knockdown and the storm that followed. "... between rounds, [Trinidad's] father and trainer, Felix Sr., quietly told him, 'You've been down before. You know what to do. Relax and box and wait for your chance.' Trinidad did just that, and when it came he clobbered poor Yori Boy until bringing USA referee Richard Steele's intervention at 2:41 of the fourth round. Trinidad pinned Campas along the ropes and landed a shot the Nevada Commission's doctors said inflicted the worst broken nose we've ever seen."

It was the sort of performance that starts a drumbeat. Two weeks later, KO Magazine compared Trinidad's win to WBC titleholder Pernell Whitaker's rematch victory versus Buddy McGirt under the headline, "IBF Welter Champ Felix Trinidad Nears Greatness: Would a Bout With Whitaker Put Him Over the Top?" Tommy Deas Jr. offered, "If Whitaker's punches are like the pitter-patter of raindrops, Trinidad's are thunder and lightning. In less than 12 minutes of action against Campas, the 21-year-old Trinidad gave us everything Whitaker does not."

a clinical dissection.

In the end, it was the right hand that ended Carr's night. A sizzling right uppercut was followed in combination with a right over the top to drop Carr for the first time in Round 8. Carr rose only to be dropped by another right to the temple moments later. Three more right hands landed flush before referee Robert Gonzalez stepped in to save Carr from further punishment.

It was Trinidad's fifth defense, fourth by knockout, and the perfect end to his best year yet.

It would be his last best year of any kind for a long time.

Seemingly on the verge of stardom, Trinidad's career would begin a frustrating stall in 1995. Including his win over Blocker in June 1993 through the knockout of Carr in December 1994, Trinidad notched three wins against fighters ranked in the welterweight top 10 by Ring Magazine along with a notable name in Camacho. From 1995-1998, in just eight starts he would add only one Ring-ranked contender in Freddie Pendleton, who was in the top 10 at 140 pounds, not welterweight.

Fellow welterweight titlists, particularly Whitaker and later Ike Quartey, were who the boxing world wanted to see Trinidad face.

Instead, Trinidad's toughest opponent in those lost years would come outside the ring in the form of his own promoter, Don King.

Trinidad followed his win over Carr in the curtain-jerking position, opening the Showtime pay-per-view telecast for the April 1995 heavyweight title fight between Oliver McCall and Larry Holmes. Trinidad stopped Roger Turner in two. Speaking to Pacheco after the win, Trinidad made clear he wanted Whitaker and "Don King is the one who's got to look at it for me."

Contemporary fans grow weary of battles between broadcast platforms in 2021. It's nothing new. When Don King's stable of fighters, led by Mike Tyson, moved from HBO to Showtime in 1991, it established a new divide that kept more fights from happening than it created. The welterweight Trinidad most wanted, needed, to reach the next level was across the street.

Trinidad tried to cross to join him.

After a string of appearances on Showtime or its pay-per-view arm, Trinidad's next appearance in the ring would come on the November 1995 HBO undercard of Whitaker-Jake Rodriguez. The intent was clear. Both men were expected to win, with the ultimate goal of setting up a showdown. Whitaker won in six. Trinidad stopped Larry Barnes in four.

There was another obstacle to solve to make Whitaker-Trinidad.

Clifton Brown reported for The New York Times, "Lou Duva, Whitaker's manager, said that Trinidad would have to be released from his promoter, Don King, before a Trinidad-Whitaker bout could take place. 'The second he is released from King, bring us a contract,' Duva said after the fight."

Trinidad was trying to secure the release. Steve Farhood reported for The Ring, "As we went to press, a Whitaker-Trinidad showdown was in the hands of the courts. Trinidad and his father and trainer, Felix Sr., have split from their manager Yamil Chade and are suing Don King for their promotional independence. If a Florida judge rules that their contract is invalid, look for the dream match to be promoted by Main Events and Square Ring before half the year is out. If King wins in court (which, if you haven't noticed, he's wont to do), 'that's it,' acknowledged HBO Sports Vice President Lou DiBella."

Trinidad and King mended fences and Trinidad was back on Showtime by February 1996. While Trinidad was still calling for Whitaker, the plan appeared to shift toward an eventual showdown with junior middleweight leader Terry Norris. Norris, then, was also promoted by King. Trinidad's return to Showtime against Rodney Moore represented at least one small victory besides the fourth-round stoppage Trinidad scored in his eighth defense.

Trinidad's name was on the top of the marquee.

William Nack recounted for Sports Illustrated, "Until the Moore fight, [Trinidad] had a reputation as one of the greatest living fighters who had never fought a main event. And even last Saturday's bout was overshadowed by the medical suspension of Tommy Morrison, who was scheduled to fight on the undercard. Trinidad had become the best-kept secret in boxing. Just a year ago, when Whitaker was asked if he wanted to fight Trinidad, Sweet Pea thought the reference was to the country. 'I don't want to fight there,' said Whitaker."

Trinidad would fight twice more before the year was out, stopping Pendleton in five and Ray Lovato in six to notch his ninth and 10th straight defenses. Pendleton was a main event; Lovato came underneath the undercard of the Mike Tyson-Bruce Seldon heavyweight title bout. Norris also appeared on the card, by then having unified the WBC and IBF belts at junior middleweight. A big breakthrough fight for Trinidad seemed closer than ever when both were featured together again on a January 1997 card, Trinidad scoring a knockout in three over Kevin Lueshing.

Then Trinidad-Norris slipped away.

Norris exited his relationship with King to pursue a possible Oscar De La Hoya fight. Trinidad was left to make his debut as a pay-per-view and Madison Square Garden headliner with a first-round knockout of Troy Waters. It was Trinidad's debut at junior middleweight and billed as a WBC eliminator, but Trinidad opted to return to welterweight.

He also opted to return to court.

Trinidad scored his 12th defense of the IBF welterweight belt in April 1998 with a fourth-round stoppage of Mahenge Zulu. He followed it in June with another attempt to leave King. By then, Whitaker had

Trinidad got off the floor to halt dangerous Mexican warrior Yori Boy Campas.

lost his title to De La Hoya, who had emerged as the biggest star below heavyweight since Sugar Ray Leonard. From the moment "The Golden Boy" arrived at welterweight, boxing fans wondered about a showdown with the Puerto Rican knockout artist.

Trinidad made his move. Tim Smith reported for The New York Times that Trinidad signed an eight-fight, $30 million deal with Main Events and HBO. Smith referred to Trinidad as "one of the best but most unheralded boxers in the most competitive division in the sport. 'I am a star right now,' Trinidad, a 25-year-old from Puerto Rico, said through an interpreter. 'With Don King I didn't receive the treatment as a star. With this contract I expect HBO and Main Events to put me on the level of a star.' If all goes as expected, Trinidad, who has a 33-0 record with 28 knockouts, will start his tenure with Main Events and HBO with a flourish, going against Ike Quartey, the World Boxing Association welterweight champion."

All did not go as expected.

King, who argued he still had two years on his deal with Trinidad, won again in court. One more time, the fighter and promoter settled their differences, but this time things really would be different. After years of acrimony, the interests of King and HBO had aligned again. A heavyweight unification between Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield (who had been promoted by King and fighting exclusively on Showtime since challenging Mike Tyson) and the services of Trinidad with an eye toward a unification battle versus De La Hoya meant riches for all.

In the winter of 1998, an unofficial tournament at welterweight would commence. De La Hoya, who held the WBC title, was set to face Quartey, who by then was forced to give up the WBA belt but still undefeated. Trinidad, finally, would see Whitaker.

Trinidad's chance, his moment, had finally arrived.

There will always be room to wonder what might have been if Trinidad's chances had come sooner. What would a Whitaker fight have looked like when Whitaker still rode the top of the pound-for-pound charts? Could Tito have bested Quartey? Would his power have found the inconsistent chin of Norris? How much more could Trinidad have accomplished from 1995-98?

Those questions will never have answers. Trinidad's reign through the end of 1998 was outstanding, regardless. Twelve title defenses, 10 wins in a row by knockout, multiple dramatic rebounds from knockdowns and over five years as the IBF's standard-bearer at welterweight had set the stage. Still only 26, Trinidad had the numbers of a great champion.

In 1999, he would have the opponents to prove them true.

THE RING MAGAZINE

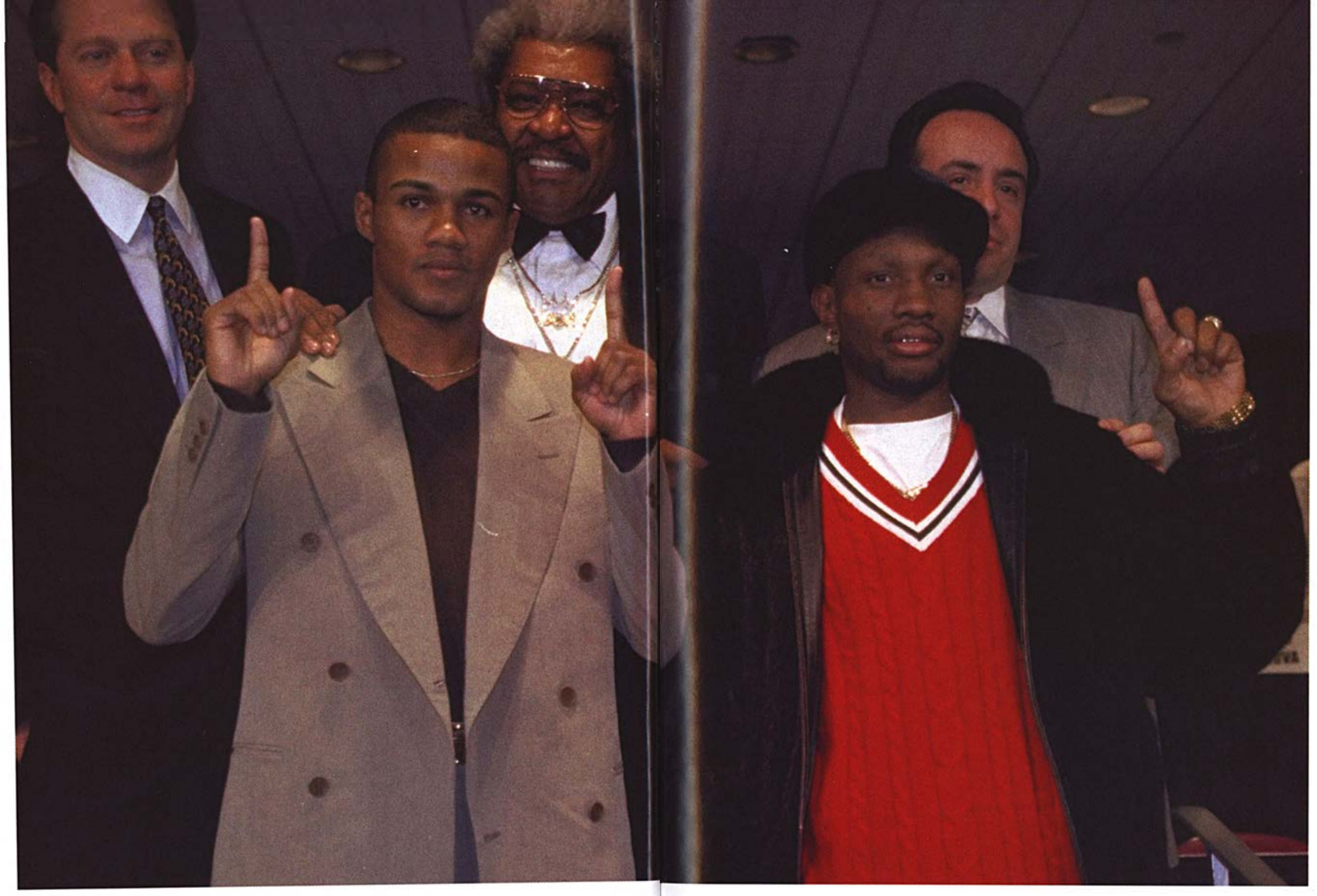
CHASING A LEGEND

TRINIDAD'S 'HOLY GRAIL' SHOWDOWN WITH **PERNELL WHITAKER** WAS MORE ELUSIVE OUTSIDE OF THE RING THAN THE AGING DEFENSIVE WIZARD HIMSELF PROVED TO BE WHEN THEY FINALLY FOUGHT

By **Bernard Fernandez**

It is always a good thing when two indisputably great fighters, no-doubt-about-it future Hall of Famers, meet in the ring to settle some arguments as to which one is better, not only for a particular night but for purposes of historical posterity. But the timing of such superbouts can be as important as the identity of the participants, which is why IBF welterweight champion Felix "Tito" Trinidad's wide unanimous decision over former WBC welterweight ruler Pernell "Sweet Pea" Whitaker on February 20, 1999, in Madison Square Garden still comes with, to

PHOTO BY AL BELLO



some people's way of thinking, a figurative asterisk.

Trinidad had been lobbying for a showdown with Whitaker for six years, almost from the moment when, at age 20, he lifted the 147-pound IBF championship from Maurice Blocker by emphatically knocking out the two-time titlist in two rounds on June 19, 1993, in San Diego. To be the best, you have to fight and defeat the best, the very young and very confident Trinidad figured, and at that point in time Whitaker was widely regarded as the finest practitioner of the pugilistic arts, regardless of weight class. The elusive southpaw from Norfolk, Virginia, was a defensive virtuoso who had enough pop to get opponents out of there as the occasion warranted, but whose stock-in-trade was frustrating even highly capable fighters and making them seem almost inept.

Trinidad's father/trainer Felix Trinidad Sr., himself a former fighter, no doubt would have cautioned his son, and probably did, that patience can be a virtue. The opportunity Tito envisioned of taking the express route from mere alphabet titlist to instant legend might benefit from a couple more years of marinating and experience-building. Still, the impetuosity of youth is such that when you want something so badly, you want it right now and not at some hazy, indeterminate date down the road.

The hoped-for showdown with Whitaker, whom he then regarded as the ultimate litmus test of his own worthiness to the claim of being the best of the best in the welterweight division, came into sharper focus when both appeared on the same card, on November 18, 1995, in the co-featured bouts of an HBO-televised doubleheader in Atlantic City's Boardwalk Hall. Whitaker took on former IBF junior welterweight titlist Jake "The Snake" Rodriguez in the main event, preceded by Trinidad's defense against top-rated contender Larry Barnes. As most expected, both champions passed those tests with relative ease, Whitaker knocking out Rodriguez in six rounds and Trinidad stopping Barnes in four.

But even before he took care of business against Barnes, who lost for only the second time in 41 professional bouts, it appeared that Trinidad's mind was less on his soon-to-be-vanquished rival than on the grand prize of a clash with Whitaker.

"I think about it all the time," Trinidad said of what he had come to regard as his personal quest to procure boxing's Holy Grail. "I always imagine Whitaker changing his style, getting frustrated, going toe-to-toe and getting knocked out. When the time comes that we actually do fight, I can't say he'll cooperate by standing and trading. But whatever he does, I still intend to knock him out.

"I don't think it's any secret that I've always wanted to fight Whitaker. I believe it's a fight the people really want to see. When we do fight, it'll be something they'll be talking about for 20 years. I will fight Whitaker any time, any place ... the sooner the better."

For his part, Whitaker agreed that a fight between himself and Trinidad, or someone of comparable status, would be a positive in a general sense.

"I would love for that fight to happen," Whitaker said with the casualness of a king who cared only so much about the names and credentials of the doomed-to-failure aspirants to his throne. "Boxing is about putting the best against the best. That hasn't happened too often lately. People are coming out of the woodwork wanting to fight Pernell Whitaker now, and that's good."

And his impressions of Trinidad?

"I've heard he's good," Whitaker said, almost dismissively. "To tell the truth, I've never actually seen him fight. But I don't daydream about anybody. Whatever happens, happens. I'm ready for whatever."

Trinidad-Whitaker was six years in the making and when it happened, Tito held all the aces.

JAMIE SQUIRE

The roadblocks to making a Whitaker-Trinidad fight in that impediment-clogged era of boxing were fairly standard: Whitaker was with Main Events and his fights were televised by HBO, while Trinidad was with Don King and fought on Showtime. But a fissure in the wall separating the two sides opened when Trinidad, who had grown increasingly frustrated by relatively small purses (he had never received more than $300,000 to that point for any fight under King, most of which came on undercards topped by Julio Cesar Chavez and others perceived to be more prestigious in the DKP galaxy) and the increasing likelihood he never would get the chance to test his skills against Whitaker, sought to escape the "King-dom." In seeking legal redress to free himself from what he believed to be a prohibitively restrictive contract, Trinidad retained Pensacola, Florida, attorney Fred Levin, the adviser to IBF super middleweight champ Roy Jones Jr.

While the contractual knots were being untangled, Main Events, which won a purse bid, was able to stage Trinidad-Barnes on HBO for what was then a career-high $800,000 payday for Tito. But following that bout, Trinidad somewhat curiously opted to sign a new and improved long-term deal with King, which addressed some of his previous concerns but again had the effect of making a fight with Whitaker something less than a certainty in the short term and even the long term.

The third side to what could be described as an intriguing triangle of elite welterweights was Oscar De La Hoya, the vastly popular 1992 Olympic gold medalist who had been groomed for stardom from the time he turned pro with Top Rank shortly after the Barcelona Games. Seventeen months following Whitaker's dismissal of Rodriguez, he lost a fairly wide unanimous decision and his WBC welterweight belt to the "Golden Boy," a fight that many observers thought was much closer than the scorecards had indicated. Not unexpectedly, Whitaker complained that he had been the victim of still another heist by pencil. And, truth be told, his previous non-victories – a hotly disputed split-decision loss to WBC lightweight titlist Jose Luis Ramirez (which he avenged with a 12-round shutout in the rematch) and a majority draw with Chavez – were dubious at best and miscarriages of justices at worst. Little wonder that Whitaker, who would take a 40-2-1 record with 17 KOs into his confrontation with Trinidad, insisted that he was actually undefeated and still enjoying the view from atop his sport's highest mountain.

But the passage of time, boxing's great equalizer, was not the only nibbler at the edges of all that had made Whitaker the absolute master of all he had once surveyed. He had had only one bout after the hard day's night he had endured against De La Hoya, a surprisingly close 12-round unanimous decision over Russia's Andrey Pestryaev on October 17, 1997, an eliminator for the WBA welterweight title, a result which was changed to a no-decision after "Sweet Pea" tested positive for cocaine. Rumors of Whitaker's drug and alcohol dependency were by then public knowledge, with his obligatory participation in a six-month drug detoxification program to regain his boxing license accounting in part for the 17-month layoff between his appearance against Pestryaev and challenge of Trinidad. It was a testament to how much Whitaker, then 35, had supposedly slipped that he was a 5-1 opening-line underdog against the younger (26), undefeated (33-0, 29 KOs), harder-hitting Tito, a betting line that was whittled

down a bit to 9-2 after Trinidad, who was said to be in the mid-150s a week before the bout, needed additional time on weigh-in day to sweat off however much was required to make the 147-pound limit, which he hit exactly, as had Whitaker.

The possibility that Trinidad had dangerously dehydrated himself no doubt led to some late money coming in for Whitaker, but so did the nagging conviction on the part of the former champion's many admirers that he would again reveal himself to be all, or at least most, of what he had been during his glorious prime. Certainly Whitaker thought that to be the case, and he even rejected the notion that Trinidad still wanted to test himself against someone whose impregnable defensive style was anathema to a skilled, come-forward banger such as Tito.

"Those times are behind me," Whitaker said when pressed about his recent troubles out of the ring. "Everything's moving forward for me, OK? I can't look back; I don't look back. Whatever happened, happened. They took a year, more than a year, from my boxing life. Somebody's going to have to pay for that.

"I normally take guys the distance and they never want to see me again. Hopefully, the kid comes with a good package, because I'm not going to give him anything for free. He's going to have to earn everything he gets. No way this kid can beat me. He's scared to death of me. I'm still the best, pound-for-pound. I don't even have to think that. I know."

But Trinidad – showing no evidence of impairment from his supposed difficulty making weight – soon convinced Whitaker of the folly of believing the supposedly petrified and drained champion was not in the same league as him. Although Whitaker won the first round, he did so by standing and trading, as Trinidad years earlier had hoped he would, instead of employing the airtight defense, clever movement and quick-strike counters that had become his calling cards dating back to his gold-medal-winning performance at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. Perhaps that switch in tactics was intentional, at the behest of Whitaker's first-time trainer, Tommy Brooks, but maybe it owed to Papa Trinidad's assessment that this was a diminished version of the fighter that had been, with age, drugs and alcohol indeed taking their toll.

The script for the second round and thereafter was much the same as had been the case in the opening stanza, with the exception that it was Trinidad who landed the more frequent and more damaging punches, delivered with both hands. Trinidad registered the only official knockdown in the fight in the second round, with a straight right hand, although there were two instances when two more floorings, in the 10th and 12th rounds, might have been cited as such by referee Benjy Esteves Jr. when the bottom of Whitaker's trunks brushed against the canvas as he resorted to his trademark duck-squat to avoid incoming barrages.

The first and the seventh rounds were the only rounds in which it could be said with any certainty that Whitaker got the better of it. The seventh round momentarily raised the hopes of Whitaker supporters that he was marshaling his energy for a late surge, Brooks telling his fighter, who had scored well with digging blows to the body upon his return to his corner, "If you fight the rest like this, you got this thing, dog."

But Whitaker's rally proved to be short-lived. Trinidad again asserted himself in a dominant Round 8, and in the 10th his accuracy was such that CompuBox had him landing 23 of 34 punches, almost all of which were power shots, a ridiculous 67.6 percent connect rate. For the night, Whitaker, valiant to the very end, landed 234 of 749, a tepid 31 percent, while Trinidad was at 54 percent, accuracy normally observed only in Rocky movies. Tito might indeed have gotten the stoppage he so clearly wanted had it not been for Papa Trinidad advising him to not take unnecessary chances in the final two rounds, lest he walk into a desperation bomb from Whitaker while too far ahead on the scorecards to lose on points.

True to his steadfast belief that the only way he could ever lose a prizefight was by chicanery, Whitaker again protested that he had been wronged by the judges, insisting, "He [Trinidad] didn't do anything. Yeah, I thought I won. Let the public decide. The fans can score for themselves." He also said the broken jaw he had sustained in the fifth round was the result of an errant Trinidad elbow instead of a punch.

There was no wiggle room on the cards to support Whitaker's version of what had transpired, as Robert Beeba Exton and Melvina Lathan both had it 118-109 and Samuel Conde Lopez at 117-111. Asked if he would now consider retirement, Whitaker, defiant to the last, said, "Not until somebody beats me." HBO's veteran analyst, Larry Merchant, remarked that that was exactly what was in the process of happening early in the developing rout when he said, "We said going into the fight that nobody has ever looked good fighting Whitaker. Felix Trinidad looks good fighting Whitaker."

Trinidad cited his far-more-convincing conquest of Whitaker than De La Hoya as more proof of something he already believed to be true. "I am," he said at the post-fight press conference, "the best welterweight in the world."

In the end, opinions always vary, even after winners and losers of fights have been determined in the record books. Did Trinidad beat a depleted Whitaker who was close to running on empty? An argument can be made that it was so, Whitaker losing his next and final bout, a fourth-round stoppage at the hands of Carlos Bojorquez (result of a shoulder injury) on April 27, 2001, after a layoff of 26 months. Was Trinidad better than De La Hoya? Maybe, maybe not. Tito did win, by majority decision on September 18, 1999, their unification matchup, the most-anticipated welterweight scrap since Sugar Ray Leonard-Thomas Hearns I on Sept. 18, 1981, but that owed in no small part to De La Hoya's miscalculation of thinking he was far enough ahead on the cards to play keepaway the last three rounds. Unfortunately for him, his lead was not as wide as Trinidad's vs. Whitaker, making for a controversy that still is the stuff of numerous debates and arguments.

Degrees of excellence are always subject to individual interpretation, great fighters' career arcs not always intersecting at optimal times during a given era, and sometimes not at all. Whitaker – who was just 55 when he died on July 14, 2019, after being struck by a car as he was crossing the street, is a first-ballot inductee into the International Boxing Hall of Fame (2007), as are Trinidad and De La Hoya (both 2014). Until a better way of determining what is or was comes along, that will just have to suffice.

Whitaker was down early on from a right hand but fought bravely until the final bell.

AL BELLO

GOLDEN GIFT

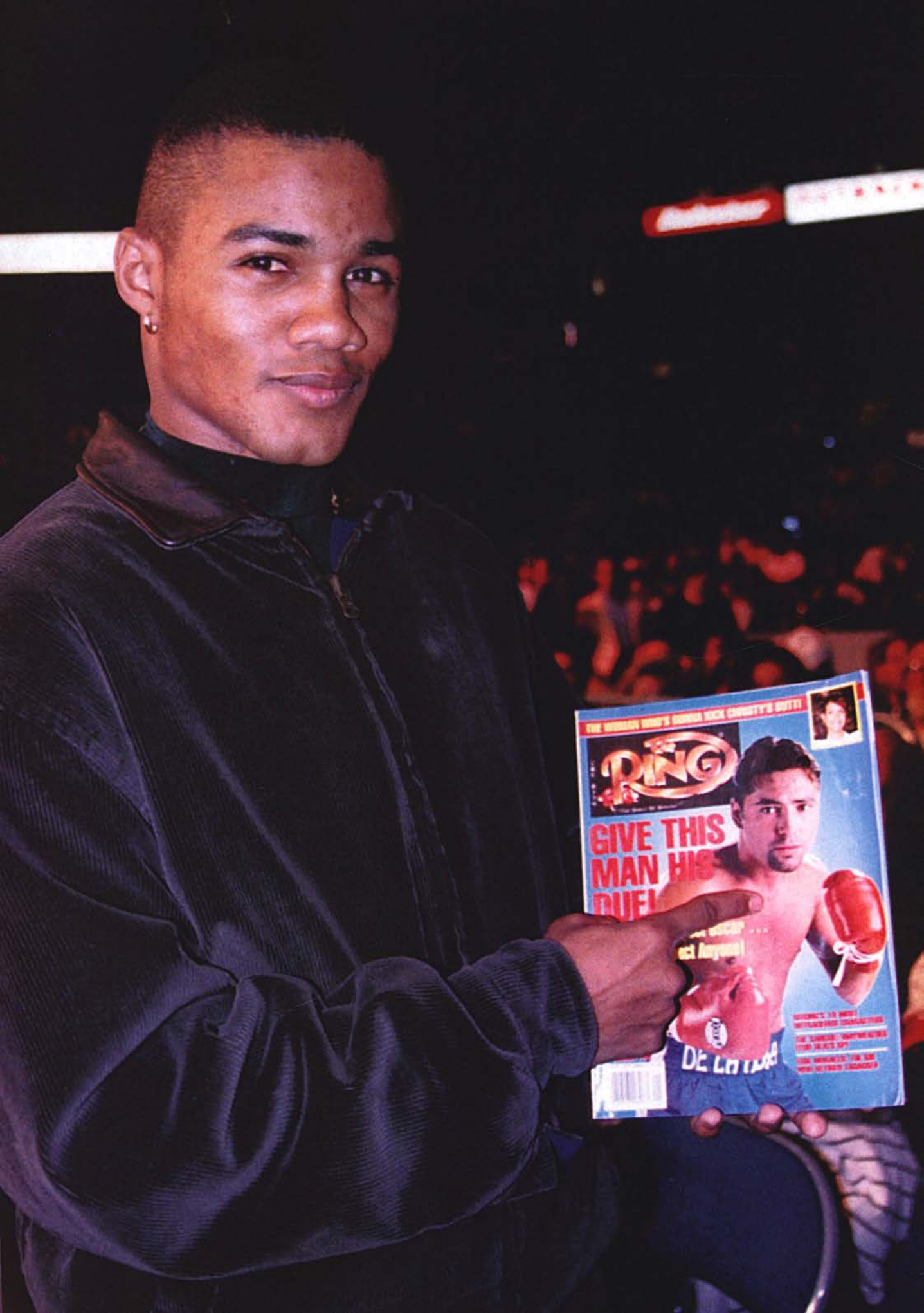
SEEMINGLY ON THE VERGE OF HIS FIRST LOSS, **TRINIDAD** WOULD INSTEAD PREVAIL AFTER A BAFFLING SWITCH OF TACTICS BY **OSCAR DE LA HOYA** – AND AN ICONIC CONTROVERSY WAS BORN

By **Michael Rosenthal**

PHOTO BY GARY WILLIAMS

The fight between Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya on September 18, 1999, is remembered primarily for what many believe was a bad decision.

De La Hoya outboxed Trinidad for nine rounds and then ran for the final three, turning a dull clinic into a lingering controversy in front of 11,184 disappointed spectators at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas. Trinidad was awarded


RING
GIVE THIS

a majority decision victory, which unified two of the welterweight titles and elevated him to the pinnacle of the division.

Lost in the passionate debate over the scoring is the magnitude of the fight. It was compared beforehand to the classic 1981 Ring Magazine Fight of the Year between Hall of Famers Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns, won by Leonard.

And why not? De La Hoya and Trinidad were young (both 26), unbeaten, already accomplished and idols in their respective constituencies.

De La Hoya, like Leonard in his time, was the face of the sport. The Golden Boy, an Olympic champion from the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, was impossibly good-looking, charismatic and unusually talented. He was already a four-division champion at the time he met Trinidad.

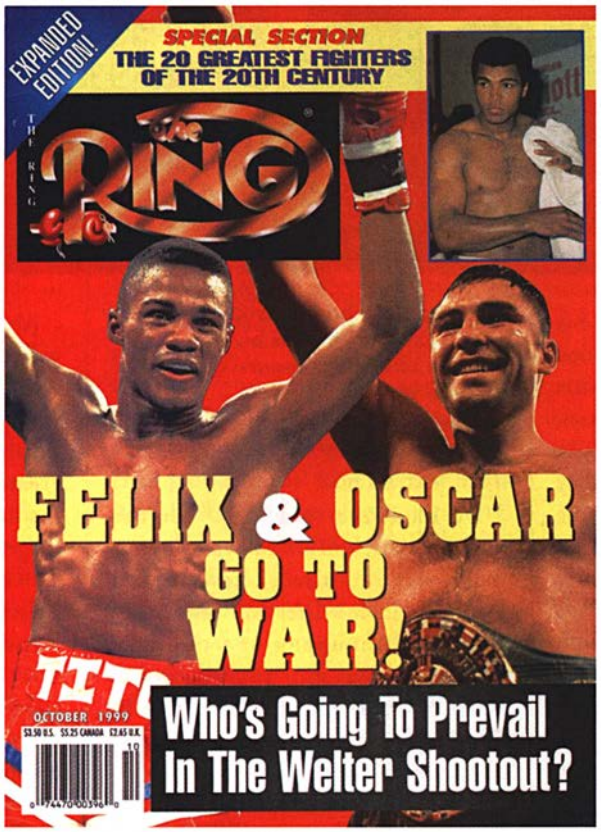
Trinidad was on an impressive run as a 147-pound titleholder, with 14 successful defenses after stopping Maurice Blocker in two rounds to win the belt in 1993. Twelve of those successful defenses came by knockout, evidence of his devastating punching power. Only boxing wizards Hector Camacho and Pernell Whitaker were able to take Trinidad the distance during that stretch.

De La Hoya and Trinidad were a combined 66-0 (with 55 knockouts) going into the fight, De La Hoya 31-0 (25 KOs) and Trinidad 35-0 (30 KOs). It's no wonder they were in the top three of the pound-for-pound rankings, with Roy Jones Jr.

There also was the ethnic rivalry. Trinidad was Puerto Rican, De La Hoya Mexican-American. It wasn't a perfect Puerto Rico vs. Mexico matchup, which is one of the sport's fiercest rivalries. De La Hoya was seen as more American than Mexican south of the border. Still, the fighters' bloodlines only added to the pre-fight drama. And, finally, there was another compelling rivalry involved: promoters Bob Arum vs. Don King, who were working together for the first time in many years.

The fight fell far short of living up to the hype, but De La Hoya vs. Trinidad was one of the biggest events of the era.

"There were a lot of ingredients that made it a special fight," said Hall of Famer matchmaker Bruce Trampler of Top Rank, Arum's promotional company. "It just felt right from every perspective."



De La Hoya was one of the first fighters to set up camp in the serene mountain resort of Big Bear, California, on a regular basis. He was training there for his meeting with Trinidad when, about 10 days before the fight, he suffered an injury that Trampler believes played a role in his late-fight tactics.

Trampler, who worked with De La Hoya back then but hasn't spoken to him in years, was in the gym at the time.

"He was shadowboxing in the ring," Trampler said. "He tried to pivot on the soft canvas, but his left foot didn't pivot as he threw a left hook. You could hear a popping sound. I don't know whether it was a ligament, a tendon or what, but he collapsed like he got shot.

"We took him to a clinic up there in Big Bear, a physical therapist he had worked with. And I called Arum right away. He said, 'Listen, if the kid is hurt, we can cancel or postpone the event.' Oscar said, 'No, don't cancel it. I'm going to fight.'

"The injury obviously didn't need surgery; it was a sprain. He couldn't do road work over the week leading up to the fight. He only sat on a stationary bike. I always felt that impeded his conditioning."

De La Hoya appeared to be at his physical best when the opening bell rang. Most observers agreed that he gave his rival a boxing lesson during the first three quarters of the fight, even if you gave Trinidad a round or two.

The slugger from San Juan stalked his prey but had neither the speed nor the ring acumen to catch him with any consistency, as De La Hoya used his feet – bad ankle and all – to move deftly around the ring, land quick punches and generally control everything that was happening inside the ropes.

I remember thinking by the middle of the fight, "De La Hoya is making Trinidad look foolish." It was an observation that I would later learn was echoed by a member of the HBO broadcasting crew: "Outclass is too big of a word for what's happening here, but it's verging on that," blow-by-blow commentator Jim Lampley said during Round 9.

Trinidad's big bombs frequently sailed through the air but he applied enough pressure to claim a famous win.

De La Hoya seemed to be on his way to a shockingly easy victory, one that would bolster his credentials as a truly great fighter. And then, inexplicably at the time, he suddenly opened the door to a Trinidad victory and the controversy by retreating the final three-plus rounds of the fight.

Why? Some believe he felt Trinidad's power and wanted no more of it. That was the Puerto Rican's theory. "He seemed uncomfortable, because he kept running," he told HBO for a documentary a few years later. "He knew if he stopped to fight, he could've been knocked out, because he knew that I was the harder puncher. That's why he was always on the run."

Others believe that De La Hoya felt he was far enough ahead on the scorecards that he could afford to box carefully, which reflected what his cornermen told him late in the fight.

And perhaps he was simply weary. That would lend credence to Trampler's suggestion that De La Hoya was unable to train properly because of his ankle injury, although the fighter never mentioned that.

"He ran because he was out of gas," Trampler said.

De La Hoya told HBO for the same documentary: "I have to admit that I was a bit tired. I never boxed like that in my life. My legs were shaking. I thought I had the fight in the bag after nine rounds, so I'm going to cruise the last three rounds. That's what my corner told me to do, so I said, 'OK, let's do it.'

"... If I had the opportunity to do it again, I wouldn't cruise. I would go out there for the kill, because I felt so confident that night that I could do anything I wanted. I made a mistake. I did cruise, and it was the biggest mistake of my life."

It certainly was a big one.

Trinidad won a majority decision by scores of 115-113, 115-114 and 114-114. Two of the three judges gave Trinidad the final three rounds, while the third – Bob Logist of Belgium – somehow scored Round 12 for the reluctant De La Hoya.

That means that De La Hoya would've won the fight had he taken one more round on the two closest cards. He didn't. As a result, Trinidad walked away with the biggest victory of his career.

"I had beaten the Golden Boy," Trinidad said. "It was a moment of great emotion. I cried when I heard the decision. It's a moment I'll never forget."

Most fans weren't as happy as Trinidad. First of all, they had hoped to see a genuine fight, not a boxing exhibition and then a three-round track meet. That didn't happen, which was a disappointment. And, second, they could never have imagined that De La Hoya would've stopped fighting with three rounds to go.

Still, "The Fight of the Millennium," as it was dubbed, certainly hasn't been forgotten ... but for another reason.

"It's remembered as a big fight that missed," boxing historian and writer Cliff Rold told The Ring. "It's interesting to watch but far from a great fight. However, it's also still a fight that matters. To this day, it sparks passionate debate about the outcome despite never really catching fire in the ring."

Indeed, the fire still burns over the scoring.

Some capable analysts agreed with the judges, including Rold. I strongly disagreed. I had De La Hoya winning 116-112, eight rounds to four. I don't believe it was possible to give Trinidad the necessary seven rounds to win the fight given the first nine rounds, eight of which I gave to De La Hoya.

I had a theory as to why the judges landed where they did. Las Vegas had become De La Hoya's town because of his popularity and the ungodly sums of money he generated in his fights. And, as the house fighter, he was expected to be given the benefit of any doubt when it came to scoring.

Well, the judges shot down that notion when they handed in their scorecards.

What happened? I always thought that they bent over backward to be fair to Trinidad but went too far in that direction, which turned what should've been a victory for De La Hoya into a close decision for Trinidad.

The card of veteran judge Jerry Roth was particularly curious: He gave Trinidad three of the first four rounds, a portion of the fight that almost everyone agrees De La Hoya dominated. Arum called Roth's scoring "preposterous."

Some have suggested that a meeting called by King at the home of the late Dr. Elias Ghanem, then-executive director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, might've played a role in the judges' thinking. King, well aware of De La Hoya's status in Las Vegas, reportedly implored Ghanem to guarantee objectivity.

"We didn't know it at the time, but King had made a push for what he called a fair decision," Trampler said. "This was Oscar's hometown, his home ring. Tito was going into the lion's den. King impressed on Ghanem, who was a pretty fair guy, the need to drill into them [the judges] that they needed to arrive at a fair decision.

"We always felt the guys leaned over too much to be impartial."

Roth, interviewed for the HBO documentary, insisted that he was 100 percent objective in his scoring. "Nobody talked to me about any assurances before the De La Hoya-Trinidad fight, unequivocally," he said.

The debate rages on.

The fight was a tremendous success from a business standpoint. It generated a reported 1.4 million pay-per-view buys and $71.4 million in revenue, which were records for non-heavyweight fights at the time. And De La Hoya and Trinidad made $23 million and $10.5 million, respectively.

The most logical course of action was to do it a second time, especially given the controversy over the scoring. Fans would surely buy into a rematch.

It never happened.

The camps did enter into negotiations, but they stalled over the distribution of money and weight. Trinidad felt that he deserved the bigger purse because he was the champion and had won the first fight. And, having had trouble making 147 pounds, he wanted to do the rematch at 154.

De La Hoya and his handlers weren't comfortable with either demand and told King as much at a meeting a few months after the fight. King then made a deal to have Trinidad fight American Olympic champion David Reid at junior middleweight. De La Hoya subsequently agreed to accept less money – 48 percent of a proposed $30 million pot, according to the Los Angeles Times – but it was too late. A deal was a deal.

Trinidad gave up his welterweight titles and fought Reid at junior middleweight in March of 2000, winning a wide decision. And he never looked back. He would fight twice more at 154 pounds and then move to 160, where he finally met his match. Bernard Hopkins outclassed him before stopping him in the 12th and final round. Some believe he followed the blueprint provided by De La Hoya.

Meanwhile, De La Hoya remained at 147 before he too moved up to 154 and then 160, although he was always a step behind Trinidad as they climbed the divisional ladder.

They would meet one more time, in boxing nirvana. It was June 2014 in idyllic Canastota, New York, the home of the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In a happy coincidence, the two rivals were inducted at the same time.

Gone was the friction that comes with most rivalries. Gone was any frustration over the disputed decision. They greeted one another like long lost friends, not adversaries.

"They were so happy interacting and, to me, it appeared they genuinely enjoyed making it to this pinnacle," an attendee told The Ring at the time.

Of course, De La Hoya, a fighter-turned-promoter-turned fighter again, isn't giving up on that rematch even as both of them approach their 50th birthdays. He pulled out of a scheduled comeback fight against former MMA star Vitor Belfort in September after contracting COVID-19, but he still plans to return to the ring, whether in a sanctioned bout or exhibition.

And one of those he has expressed an interest in fighting is none other than Felix Trinidad. De La Hoya says he still wants to avenge the 1999 setback, but the money such a nostalgic matchup would generate on pay-per-view – seven figures for both of them? – might be his primary motivating factor.

One problem: Trinidad isn't interested. De La Hoya, he said, had his chance at a second fight and blew it.

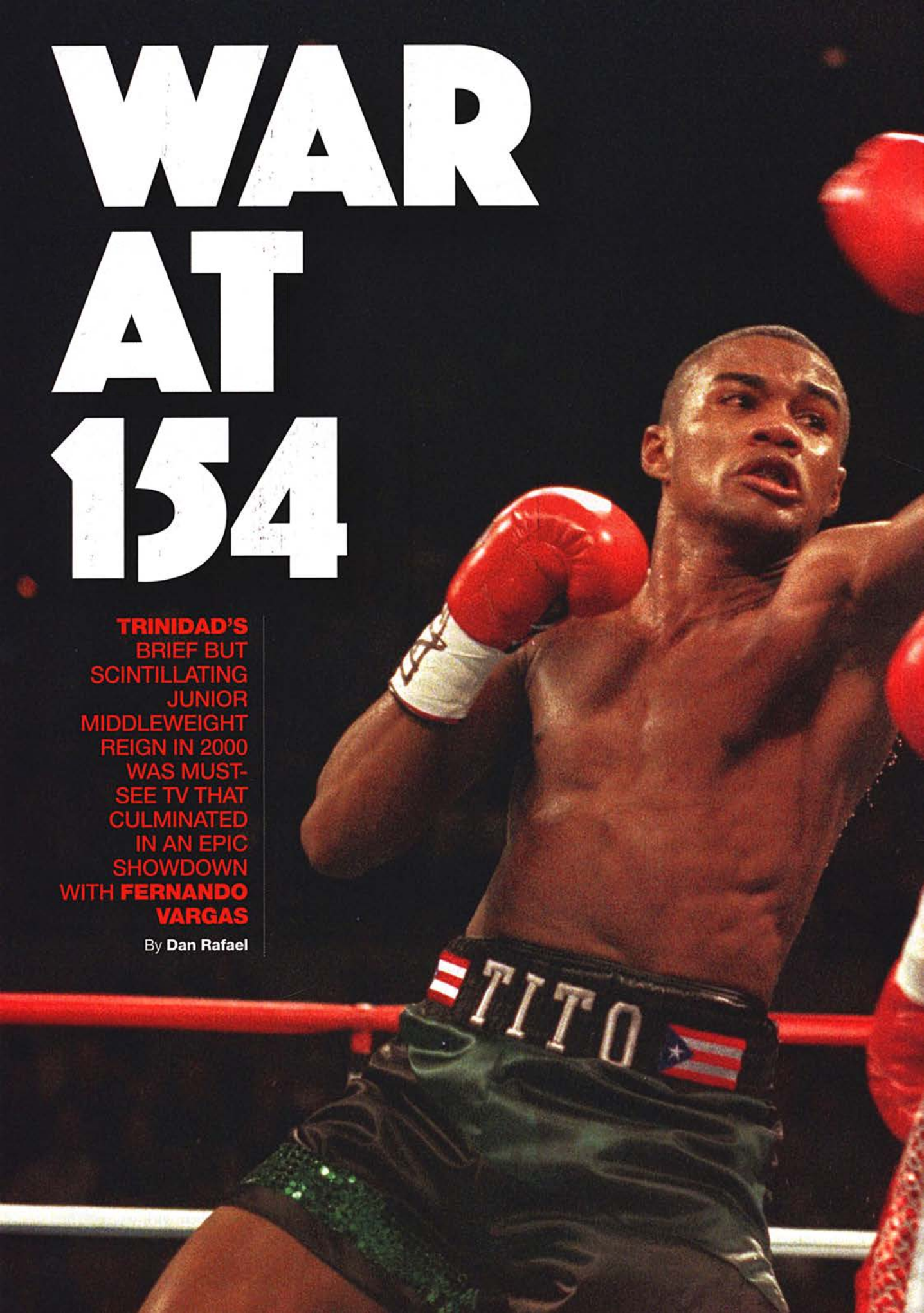
"We offered Oscar the fight eight times," Trinidad told BoxingScene.com recently. "Eight times he had the opportunity to face me since I beat him on September 18, 1999, and he did nothing. I am already retired."

De La Hoya and Trinidad are still fighting, albeit with words. The rivalry lives on.

WAR AT 154

TRINIDAD'S BRIEF BUT SCINTILLATING JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT REIGN IN 2000 WAS MUST-SEE TV THAT CULMINATED IN AN EPIC SHOWDOWN WITH **FERNANDO VARGAS**

By **Dan Rafael**



Felix "Tito" Trinidad had defended his IBF welterweight world title 15 times from 1993 to 1999 and was already a superstar. Controversy or not, he outpointed Oscar De La Hoya in their mega title unification fight and made previous notable defenses against Pernell Whitaker, Oba Carr, Yori Boy Campas and Hector Camacho.

But when Puerto Rico's Trinidad decided to move up to junior middleweight after unifying the IBF and WBC welterweight titles against De La Hoya, it was never going to be a long stay in the division. By design, Trinidad and his father/trainer Felix "Papa" Trinidad Sr. viewed it as a brief stop on the way to middleweight glory and beyond. While Trinidad, who was in his prime, had grander plans, his short stay at junior middleweight – only nine months in 2000 – was unforgettable.

It was a devastating three-fight run against quality opponents with a combined record of 67-1, including two undefeated American Olympians, and resulted in Trinidad unifying two titles in what was arguably the greatest fight in junior middleweight history.

"Those fights at 154 were what you call remarkable and irrefutable and the Fernando Vargas fight was one of the greatest fights in boxing history," said Don King, Trinidad's career-long promoter. "Here's a young man who came up from welterweight and performs like he was a natural. He did it and he did it with magnificent style and showed his greatness. It was phenomenal."

First, Trinidad battered David Reid via punishing unanimous decision to win the WBA 154-pound title on March 3 in a Showtime PPV main

Trinidad and Fernando Vargas traded bombs in an unforgettable shootout at 154 pounds.

event at an outdoor arena at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, harkening back to boxing's 1980s glory days. Reid was never the same and fought only four more times.

Four months later, having signed a multi-fight contract with HBO, Trinidad blitzed the Senegal-born, France-based Mamadou Thiam, his tough-as-nails mandatory challenger, in three rounds at American Airlines Arena in Miami.

Tito culminated his explosive stay at junior middleweight with a Dec. 2 HBO PPV fight for the ages at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. In a battle without peer at 154 pounds, Trinidad knocked out Fernando Vargas in the 12th round of an epic fight of the year contender to unify the IBF and WBA titles.

Five months later, Trinidad would move up to middleweight, but it was that ruthless three-fight run at 154 pounds, which culminated in Trinidad's selection by The Ring and other outlets as the 2000 Fighter of the Year, that went a long way toward sealing his legendary, Hall of Fame legacy.

After the De La Hoya fight, King met with Trinidad and his father to discuss their plans.

"His dad said, 'I don't know about him going up because he's really good right here and doing phenomenal.' And Tito said, 'Dad, I'll fight anybody!' He said, 'I don't care who it is.' He was from the old school," King said. "I thought he would be great at junior middleweight also. I wanted to help him do what he wanted to do, and he wanted to go up in weight."

Kery Davis, then an HBO Sports senior vice president, who was responsible for much of the network's boxing deal making and decisions on which fighters and fights to pursue, was enthralled with Trinidad. He loved the power, the smile and the passion he displayed. Trinidad and HBO had done a few fights together before he went to Showtime for the Reid fight, but Davis was as excited as could be to help engineer a multi-fight contract to bring him back to the network,

The hype machine was in full effect ahead of Trinidad-Vargas and all expectations were exceeded.

where he would fight the final eight bouts of his career.

"My feeling on Trinidad was I always thought he was going to be a star even though he didn't speak English," Davis said. "The theory was anybody who is that exciting to their own culture has something that would sell to everyone. That's the same way I felt about [Manny] Pacquiao."

Longtime TV analyst Max Kellerman believes Trinidad's best weight was 154 pounds even though he wasn't there long.

"He was a phenom at welter, but at welterweight you always got the sense that he could be toppled somehow, like he needed to fill out a little, and at middleweight he was fighting bigger guys, like Bernard Hopkins, who could take his punch," Kellerman said. "But at junior middle, he looked like he was

in his glory. He was basically the same guy at welter only he looked sturdier.

"I would say we never really got to know him at junior middleweight because he was only there briefly, but you could argue that that was him at his very best. He had this big size advantage, absurd punching power, and he just looked a little sturdier on his feet. My suspicion is Felix Trinidad's best weight was 154. That's what I suspect. I don't know if I could prove it, but I know what I saw. Trinidad at 154 was a whole lot."

After Trinidad defeated De La Hoya, King took Trinidad to Showtime to challenge Reid, the undefeated 1996 U.S. Olympic gold medalist.

"I thought he would be a better '54-pounder than he was a welterweight only because he was fairly tall and I thought he would be able to carry his power and not have to shrink down," Davis said. "One of the things we talked about at the time was an Oscar De La Hoya rematch and Oscar's people thought of that fight happening at '47. When Trinidad announced he was going to '54, it sort of put that fight on the backburner in terms of a rematch happening."

The first half of the fight with Reid, 14-0 at the time, was competitive. Reid found a home for one hard right hand after another and one caught Trinidad clean on the jaw with a little over a minute remaining in the third round to drop him to a knee. As close as the fight was for the first six rounds, however, it was all Trinidad thereafter as he severely punished Reid.

"Reid was a fast guy with real athletic ability and an amateur pedigree, and Trinidad beat him up," Kellerman said. "It was like there was nothing Reid could do with him. [The late Hall of Fame trainer and broadcaster] Emanuel Steward had the best description of him. He called him a killer robot. First couple of rounds he'd study you; then he'd put the program in and run the program and that was it; and he'd steamroll you. He overmatched David Reid."

Trinidad dropped Reid with his vaunted left hook late in the seventh round, opened a cut over his right eye in the eighth round and battered him for the rest of the fight. The 11th round was a huge one for Trinidad, who scored three knockdowns against his fading foe but also had a point deducted for a low blow. In the end, he won handily, 115-106, 114-107 and 114-106, to take Reid's belt in a highly entertaining fight and move to 37-0.

"The knockdown did not bother me," Trinidad said after the fight. "If you don't get me in the first few rounds, the fight is over. I came here to win. That's what I told everyone I was going to do, and I did it."

Trinidad was a broadcast free agent and Davis was keen to bring him back to HBO.

"We had worked with David from his pro debut and I knew David was a strong puncher and had some talent, but I did not think he was the same caliber as Felix, so the result of that fight did not surprise me," Davis said. "Then we met with Trinidad afterwards, probably within weeks of the Reid fight."

Davis, other HBO executives, Trinidad, Papa Trinidad and King gathered at the HBO offices in Manhattan to discuss a Trinidad contract with the network. It was at that meeting where Davis realized Trinidad's stay at junior middleweight was going to be quite brief.

Papa Trinidad had the floor but was speaking in Spanish "and it was interesting because I remember sitting next to [HBO attorney] Peter Mozarsky and the only thing I could understand were the names, so he'd say a couple of phrases in Spanish and then he'd say 'Mamadou.' OK, got that, he's going to want to do the mandatory.

"Then he spoke for a while and then he'd say 'Vargas.' And we

Like many Trinidad opponents, David Reid paid a heavy price for the early success that he enjoyed.

JED JACOBSOHN

The sold out Las Vegas crowd were stunned when Trinidad decked Vargas twice in Round 1.

were like, 'Ohhh, OK! If that's next, that's great.' Then he spoke for a while longer and he says, 'Hopkins.' And we're like, 'Wow, OK, that's at middleweight. He wants to move up to middleweight and fight Hopkins. And then he spoke for a few more minutes and he said 'Jones.' And I turned to Peter and I said, 'Is there a Jones in the middleweight division?' Peter said to me, 'I don't know a lot of Spanish but I think he's talking about Roy Jones.' I was like, 'Ohhhh! We're talking about a different type of fighter.' They were so ambitious in their plans and that's one of the things we loved about Felix. He would fight anyone and take on any challenge."

Trinidad had made it clear that junior middleweight was going to be a pit stop, but a memorable one based on his desire to fight Vargas before leaving.

"I thought the plan was incredibly ambitious," Davis said. "Before [going to middleweight] he took on Vargas, who was the best junior middleweight. He did not shy away from fighting the best competition. That was one of the best deals and the names were in that deal. It wasn't just that he signed a multi-fight deal and we'll pick the opponents later. No, it was, you're gonna fight Mamadou for this, Vargas and then you're going to go to middleweight and [eventually] fight Hopkins."

But first was the mandatory defense against Thiam, who was 33-1 and a tremendous puncher who had drawn comparisons as a bigger version of former welterweight titlist Ike Quartey, who had fought well against De La Hoya and Vargas in competitive losses. Trinidad started very fast and battered Thiam in the first round. Thiam was wobbling from taking so many clean shots, and with a minute left his right eye began to badly swell. It was such a dominant round the judges all had it 10-8 without a knockdown. Thiam mounted a rally in the second round and even knocked Trinidad back with a right hand.

"The second round of that fight was pretty competitive and I remember thinking Mamadou was a strong opponent and I was surprised by how Tito was able to stand in there with him and trade," Davis said.

Trinidad continued to stalk Thiam in the third round. With the challenger's eye swollen completely closed, he could not see Trinidad's left hooks coming. He took a bit more punishment until referee Jorge Alonso stopped it with 12 seconds left in the round.

With Thiam vanquished and Vargas easily disposing of Ross Thompson in four rounds a month later, their unification fight was set. It was billed as "Forces of Destruction" and was as eagerly anticipated as any fight in recent years. It matched the two best junior middleweights in the world, was universally expected to produce great action and it would add another glorious chapter to the Puerto Rico-Mexico (OK, Mexican-American in this case) rivalry.

"I thought Vargas was going to be an incredible challenge for Tito. It turned out to be a pretty good fight, right?" Davis said with a laugh. "It was a terrific fight. I thought it was a fight of the year. It made me think that Tito at '54 is a problem. This may be his best weight and he's probably the best fighter in the world at this weight, and I thought well of Vargas, that he was the second-best at the weight. You had the two best fighters in the world at that weight in an incredible action-packed fight. It was can't-miss television."

The fight delivered on all fronts as that rare big fight that exceeded lofty expectations. Trinidad-Vargas served up 12 rounds of dramatic toe-to-toe action with both men getting knocked down before the brutal ending.

"Trinidad just kept chopping away, methodically, calculated, by design, and he did the job," King said. "It made me proud. I was just so proud. It makes me feel good to talk about it. Tito was calm and wasn't trying to rush to victory like many guys would do. He kept his game plan together and he just gave Vargas a terrific whupping."

For many, the 20-0 Vargas, who was just 22 years old but had become, at 21, the youngest junior middleweight champion in history, was taking on too much, too soon in Trinidad. Those critics looked like prophets early on because just 20 seconds into the fight Trinidad connected with his calling-card left hook and dropped Vargas. He jumped right up, but moments later, Trinidad floored him again with another clean hook. A huge fight looked like it might be over in about 45 seconds as Trinidad ran across the ring and jumped on the ring ropes and raised his arms in victory.

Vargas, however, gathered himself and, with the guile of a veteran, survived. He took a nasty low blow from Trinidad in the third round but shook it off and rallied in the fourth, sending Trinidad to his backside with a clean left hook on the chin 30 seconds into the frame. Later in the round, when they were in an exchange, Trinidad nailed Vargas with a left hand well below the belt – many opined it was purposeful – that did damage and stunted Vargas' momentum. Referee Jay Nady took a point from Trinidad.

Back and forth they went in an all-out slugfest, even though Trinidad was getting the better of the action. When Vargas went low in the 10th round, he lost a point too.

Vargas would need a knockout to win in the 12th round, but he was fading fast and Trinidad closed the show in memorable fashion with three more knockdowns. When Trinidad savagely connected with a flush right hand to drop Vargas for the third time in the round, and fifth time overall, Nady waved it off at 1:33 to end the all-time great fight.

"That might be the greatest fight in junior middleweight history," Kellerman said. "When you say 'greatest fight' you're talking about what's at stake, who's involved, the action and overall you're in firm territory calling that the greatest junior middleweight fight."

It was a great fight but also very grueling for both men.

"That was my toughest fight," Trinidad said in the immediate aftermath. "He hit me with a good left hook and he hurt me a little, but I was in great condition. I always knew the fight would end in a knockout. I think I'm a great champion."

He was indeed, but his brief but electrifying time at junior middleweight was over. He could have stayed at 154 pounds, where a De La Hoya rematch would have been another blockbuster even though The Golden Boy had lost to Shane Mosley. And there was also the newly crowned welterweight champion Mosley, who was on the prowl and interested in moving up if Trinidad would fight him.

But Trinidad only had eyes for middleweight, where he won a world title in his next fight by knocking out William Joppy in the semifinals of the tournament King and HBO organized to crown the undisputed 160-pound champion.

"I was excited to see the new challenge at the new weight only because he had already beaten probably the two best guys at junior middleweight in Reid and Vargas," Davis said.

So, it was goodbye 154 and thanks for the memories.

"It was one of the most dominant, electric runs through a division of any fighter, maybe in the history of the sport, even at just three fights, just because of the caliber of the guys he fought," Davis said. "He wasn't fighting guys who were past their prime looking to pick up an easy belt. All three of them were in their prime. I think Trinidad's best weight was 154 pounds and he has to be considered among the top guys who ever fought at the weight."

RICK SOLOMON

TRINIDAD'S PERFECT RUN WOULD EVENTUALLY COME TO AN END, AND IT WOULD BE A PAIR OF WILY VETERANS WHO WOULD SHOW THE WAY

By **Tris Dixon**

THE BLUEPRINT

"Perfect," smiled Bernard Hopkins, clearly making his point. "The Executioner" was reflecting on what he was and what he needed to be when he entered the ring against the heavy betting favorite from Puerto Rico, Felix "Tito" Trinidad.

They met in the culmination of a middleweight tournament to crown a dominant world champion in a

Top: Bernard Hopkins outclassed and bullied Tito. Bottom: Winky Wright finessed the smaller man and dominated.

HOPKINS: ROBERTO SCHMIDT

WRIGHT: JED JACOBSOHN

show billed as "And Then There Was One."

Trinidad was a man on fire. He was 40-0 with 33 knockouts, having stopped Fernando Vargas at junior middleweight. He'd taken his eye-popping power up to middleweight, where he had beaten William Joppy inside five rounds in his first tournament match. Larry Merchant dubbed Trinidad "the most deadly puncher in the game" as he floored the bigger Joppy in Rounds 1, 4 and 5, hurting him often.

Trinidad looked unstoppable, to the point that ahead of the Hopkins fight there was speculation that Trinidad's name had already been engraved onto the tournament trophy in anticipation of another destructive victory. After all, Hopkins had been beaten before and he was now in his mid-30s.

Hopkins knew he needed to be flawless, but the buildup was chaotic.

For a start, during the pre-fight press tour of San Juan, Hopkins grabbed the Puerto Rican flag and threw it on the floor, inciting a near riot.

Hopkins somehow survived and that made it 1-0 in his favor, the psychological conflict won and now just the physical one remaining.

"I won the mental war when I got out of San Juan with my life," remembered the veteran Philadelphian two decades later. "I wasn't intimidated. It was something that needed to be done and I was willing to sacrifice what needed to be sacrificed to make that message clear, that at that time I wasn't being respected for the work that I had put in to get this far. I had to get the respect in another way."

But the whole narrative of the contest altered four days before Trinidad and Hopkins were originally due to meet inside Madison Square Garden in New York City.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, two airplanes were flown into the World Trade Center and everything changed.

The fight was shelved indefinitely, but Hopkins stayed ready.

He didn't want to lose focus, so he left the area he'd been staying in Manhattan – which he thought might be a continued target because of tourism and the economy – and headed to Harlem, where he thought he'd be safer.

"It might sound inconsiderate, it might sound [uncompassionate], but that wasn't my intent. It was my intent to stay focused by any means necessary," Hopkins explained.

Flanked by his police detail, the middleweight champion carried on in camp without stopping. The date was soon moved from September 15 to September 29.

"We were waiting on information and we knew Don King's staff was not going to give us any, so we took it upon ourselves," Hopkins recalled. "You couldn't leave New York, because the bridges were closed. You couldn't fly. So, Tito was going to every fire department with flowers and well-wishes like we should. But I stayed the course. I

TIMOTHY A CLARY

knew what was happening."

By the time the fight was back on, Hopkins hadn't broken stride despite the chaos of San Juan and the carnage of the terror attacks. He continued to find extra motivation by telling himself that he wasn't fighting Trinidad the person; he was facing Trinidad the knockout machine.

He told himself he was fighting the monster everyone believed Trinidad was, and Bernard was content to be the underdog in a fight experts called the biggest middleweight title bout since Marvin Hagler fought Sugar Ray Leonard. Hopkins held the IBF and WBC belts and Trinidad staked his WBA title.

"Trinidad is concerned and he's confused," said Hopkins' head trainer, Bouie Fisher. "He doesn't know what to make of Bernard. Bernard has him thinking, 'What's with this guy?'"

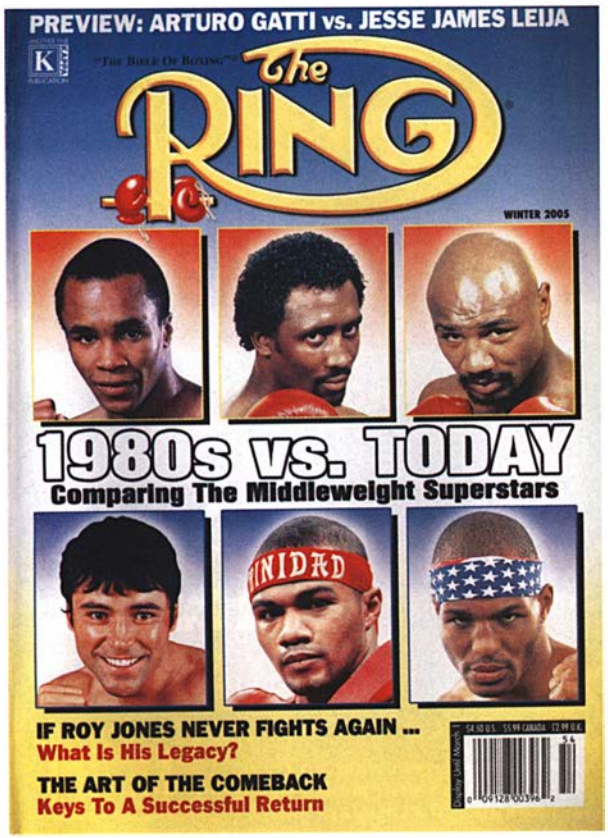
Hopkins was equally bullish.

"He hasn't had to go to Plan B his entire career," Hopkins charged. "But when it's time to get down in the trenches, he'll get back to what he always does, which is move forward and throw big shots ... But he's not going to cope with all the things I'm going to show him."

Hopkins also welcomed the pressure of the big occasion. While Trinidad had to fight for his island, where he was a national idol, he also had to beat the man who had disrespected the flag and he had to do it impressively because that's what people expected.

Hopkins had his own pressures. He had to back up his talk and his actions in San Juan, he was preparing to level Carlos Monzon's 14 middleweight title defenses, and he was fighting for America.

"Yes, and I wanted that," Bernard said of the pressure. "That's the way I operate. I had to really be on point. But I can't agree I had as much pressure on me as Trinidad had ... The pressure on me was being in the penitentiary from 17 to 23 years old. The pressure on me was being in the toughest prison in the PA system, and they've got 38 prisons in PA and Pennsylvania is big. The pressure on me is going up to the mean streets of North Philly where you see shootings, stabbings, people robbing people – I became one of those people that robbed people. I'm telling you there's no pressure that matches the pressure that I already survived. My story is different to most stories of professional boxers or athletes. When I look back at that, facing adversity, I go back to what I overcame to be where I'm at, and how is this going to take me down? If I survived life early, and I did ... and when you're young you take chances on your freedom and your life ... I wanted to let you know the pressure was on me, but not like the pressure that was on me before I became Bernard Hopkins: The Living Legend ... one of the greatest middleweights of all time. That's why I became one of the greats."



In front of 19,075 fans on an emotionally charged night in New York City, Hopkins was almost perfect following his pre-fight plan.

"Take his left hook away from him and watch when he sets; don't be there for him to rocket, because that left hook, that can cause serious, serious damage," stated Hopkins of the tactics. "I had a team. Bouie Fisher, God rest his soul. I had Naazim Richardson, who [would later become] my head trainer once Bouie passed on, and I had a severe, patient work ethic. Day by day, week by week, month by month leading up to the fight, there was a whole organized strategy to be victorious. And when it was all said and done, it was up to me and Tito to represent what we promoted when that squared circle becomes a war zone."

But while Hopkins had talked about war, this wasn't a Zale-Graziano or Hagler-Hearns war; this was the art of war.

The Philadelphian stamped his authority on the fight early and never took his foot off the gas. Not only that, he finished with a flourish, stopping Trinidad in the 12th and final round with a sharp right hand that finally drained Trinidad's body and soul.

"I'm not great yet," grinned Hopkins, basking in his historic victory. "But I will be."

"This wasn't a victory, this was a demolition," wrote one ringside journalist after the event in New York.

"There's no way in the world I was going to lose this fight," Hopkins reflected. "This was a do-or-die fight, and I ask anybody who needs to have their mind refreshed to go and look at it. Not only did I beat him, I beat him every round and then I knocked

him out. I knew that no matter how many rounds that I believed that I'm winning, I don't trust the system of boxing. I could have done like my [now-promotional] partner Oscar De La Hoya did and danced around the last two rounds, [but] they would have took the fight from me. So not only was I disciplined from the beginning, I was still disciplined to know that no matter what I think, I must knock him out – and I did."

It was Trinidad's first loss and it was emphatic.

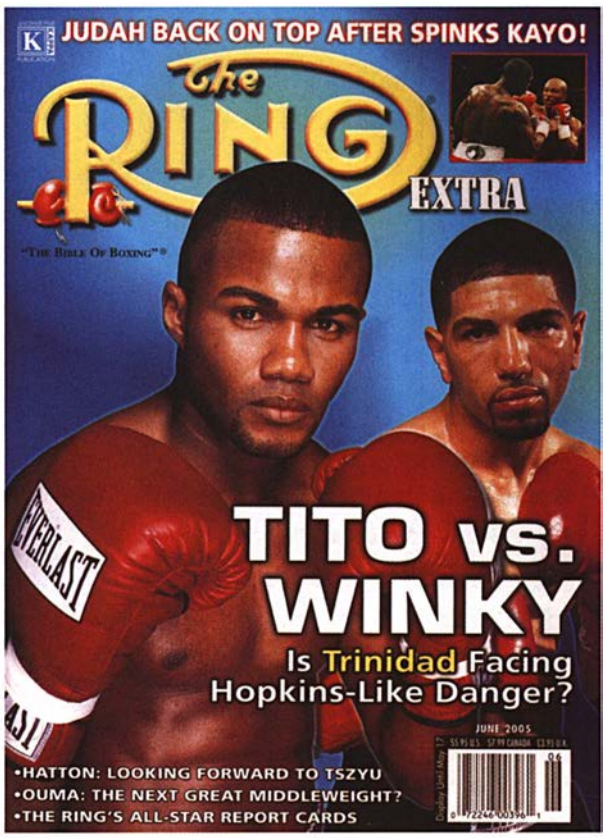
Madison Square Garden was stunned, and Hopkins broke character and did a joyous forward roll. He'd proven so many people wrong and he'd beaten the odds. Not only that, it was a launchpad.

"It was more 'I'm going to be around for a while,'" he said of his unexpected post-fight gymnastics. "[I was saying], 'Y'all gonna have to deal with me.' This is one of those moments when I couldn't be silent and just give him the stare you know me for. It wasn't one of these moments based on everything that happened leading up to the fight, the flag, 9/11, the trash-talking, the monster, a 36-year-old Bernard Hopkins ... Don't you know they've been calling me old for the last 20 years? All that was riding on Trinidad's back was too much; that's too much pressure for one man. To have to fight for his country, to fight for his family, to fight for what I've done to his flag and then 9/11. It takes a special person ... It takes a special performance to be able to execute like 'The Executioner' did. That was a perfect, *perfect* fight. I need you to highlight the word perfect because people will be glad to tell you things aren't perfect even though it goes well. I disagree."

Trinidad had deep wounds to lick. His bubble had burst.

"I'm a great champion and I don't feel bad with one loss," he said.

And he returned with a win over Hacine Cherifi in May in San Juan, and then he stopped Ricardo Mayorga back in The Garden in October 2004. There was talk of a lucrative fight with Shane Mosley, but when "Sugar" Shane was twice defeated by Florida southpaw Ronald "Winky" Wright, it was the oft-avoided man from St. Petersburg who Trinidad targeted for a lucrative middleweight non-title bout.



"He had to take the fight because they wanted him and Mosley," remembered Wright, happy at being the odd man out who would defeat both stars. "I beat Mosley, then [Trinidad] knocked out Mayorga, so everybody was saying that he had the power [at junior middleweight] and I was the fight for him, because I was 'The Man.'"

And Trinidad ducked no one.

Almost four years on from Hopkins, the Puerto Rican was up against another veteran who'd not received his just dues throughout his career, and he was up against another confident, multifaceted fighter who viewed Trinidad through a one-dimensional prism.

Wright knew all about Trinidad's reputation as a puncher.

"I'm not going to stand there and test his power," said Wright before their Las Vegas clash. "It's easy to throw punches when they're not coming back to you. I'm going to be pumping the jab."

Winky made it sound easy and his strategy was similar to that of Team Hopkins: Strip away Trinidad's best asset, his power, and give him something to think about.

"My style is different," admitted Wright recently. "Everything is different. For me, I was trying to take his power away from him. Don't let him get set, and that was my focus, not to let him get set, because he generates a lot of power when he gets set. I was trying to keep him off-balance and just move around."

All the while, he was pumping out his right jab and working angles. Trinidad had no answer.

One journalist wrote that Wright had "an immaculately precise, firm southpaw jab and not much else," but it's all he needed.

That said, he looked like the puncher in there and shook Trinidad more than once. But – like Hopkins – he maintained his discipline and stayed on message.

Wright's trainer, Dan Birmingham, had called it from the get-go, and when the tactics worked early there was no reason to change anything.

"I knew after the first round Tito was easy to hit," said the coach. "I kept the advice the same: Keep the jab in his face."

Of course, Trinidad's reputation as a puncher stayed with him and

Rappers Benny Boom (left) and Busta Rhymes with Trinidad and Wright in 2005.

Wright was aware of it, but like Hopkins he was unfazed by it.

"I never feared no man," Winky continued, saying he could feel the weight of Trinidad's punches on his arms and shoulders. "I don't care who they beat, who they knocked out. I feel that you haven't fought me, so I didn't care if you were bigger than me in weight, smaller, whatever. I never feared his power. I knew he had good power. I knew if he could catch you, he could hurt you, so I knew he wasn't going to catch me like that. I just stayed focused."

Like Hopkins saying he needed to be perfect, Wright knew he couldn't switch off for a moment, but he admitted he had expected more from the Puerto Rican idol.

"I was surprised the fight went the way it did," said Wright. "I thought it would be a little harder, but it just wasn't his night that night. Take nothing away from him; he's a great fighter and we all have those nights where it ain't our night."

Trinidad could do nothing with him. He was ineffective and utterly nullified. But Wright disagrees with Hopkins, who said Trinidad wasn't the same fighter after his first loss.

"Yeah, he was the same fighter," argued Wright. "Styles make fights, and sometimes you get certain people who fight a certain way and it's not a good style for them, and I don't think I matched up as a good style for him. He was used to being able to catch somebody with that power, but I'm defense-focused, so it was hard for him to get off on me like that."

Trinidad was not only handed the second loss of his career, but the second comprehensive loss of his career.

Hopkins puts the Trinidad fight up there with his wins over De La Hoya, Kelly Pavlik and Antonio Tarver, and Wright puts the win over Trinidad up there with his Mosley victories.

"That's the top," said Wright. "Him and Shane Mosley were the top of my career because they were household names and people didn't give me a chance with them, so that motivated me more to train hard and do what I had to do to win."

It was the same with Hopkins. Two old-school veterans who had waited so long for their big nights had their coming-out parties at Trinidad's expense, and Wright and Hopkins would eventually fight in 2007, with Hopkins winning a decision.

By then they, along with Trinidad, De La Hoya, Mosley and others, had defined an era but reminded the new school that there ain't no school like the old school.

"Perfect," smiled Wright, his point made.

TAMING THE BEAST

IN AN UNFORGETTABLE RETURN TO MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, **TRINIDAD** WOULD FACE THE DANGEROUSLY HEAVY HANDS OF NICARAGUAN WILD MAN **RICARDO MAYORGA**

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

DON EMMERT/AFP

The crowd began to gather as Felix Trinidad exited Madison Square Garden. It had just been announced that he was ending his two-year retirement to face Ricardo Mayorga in that same iconic building on October 2, 2004.

Businesspeople on their lunch hour, boxing fans from seemingly everywhere and some casual onlookers trying to see what was going on got perilously close to the former three-division world champion, but he kept smiling. When I asked him what he missed the most during his time away from the ring, his grin grew even wider as he stopped and slapped his face with

both hands.

"The punches," Trinidad said before being whisked to a nearby car and driven out of Midtown Manhattan to the roars he had become so used to over the course of his storied career, one many believed was over for good after a fourth-round stoppage of Hacine Cherifi on May 11, 2002.

It was the perfect way to go out for the fighting pride of Cupey Alto, Puerto Rico, who got his 41st pro win and 34th knockout in front of his people at the Coliseo Roberto Clemente in San Juan. After winning welterweight, junior middleweight and middleweight titles, there was nothing left to prove for the popular knockout artist, who got a nice sendoff with Cherifi after suffering the first loss of his career to Bernard Hopkins eight months prior.

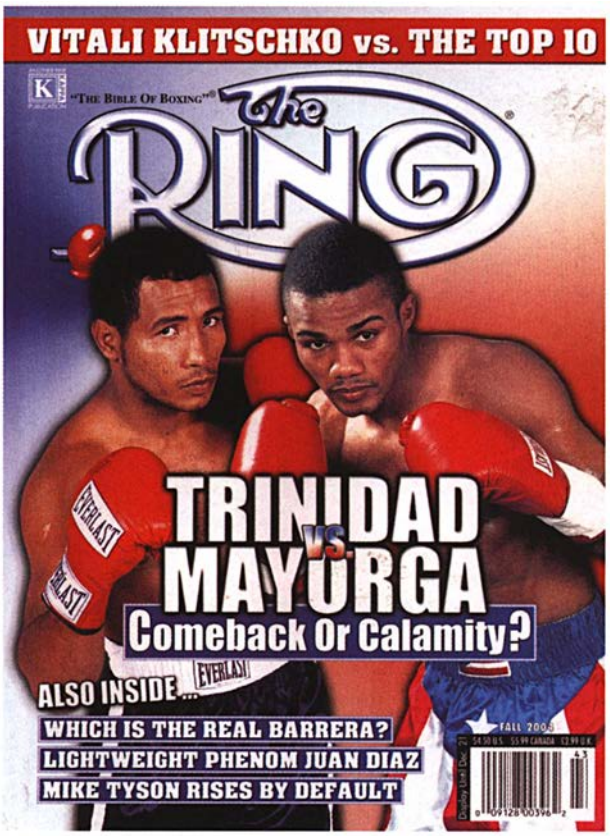
The Hopkins fight at MSG was an emotional one for a city that was recovering from the devastation of the 9/11 attacks just two weeks before the bout, and on that night, Hopkins was in his best form ever while Trinidad was a step behind all night, ultimately getting stopped in the 12th round. There would be no miracle comebacks, no left hook to save the day, and though only 28 at the time of the fight, most assumed that the wars over the years had caught up with him.

Yet some believed that it was just a bad night for "Tito."

"Trinidad was coming off a painful loss against Bernard Hopkins, a fight in which he came in not at his peak condition," said Carlos Narvaez Rosario, sports editor of El Vocero, who covered Trinidad's career extensively. "It should also be noted that Tito totally forgot about his preparation for the fight with Hopkins [as he spent time helping] in New York City after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. There he showed again that humanity that makes him stand out."

Whatever the reason for his defeat on September 29, 2001, one that saw grown men draped in the flag of Puerto Rico crying on the F train to Brooklyn, Trinidad chose to walk away after the Cherifi fight, shocking his island but not diluting his appeal.

"Imagine the Yankees losing in the World Series," Narvaez said. "The same thing happened with the loss of Tito against Hopkins. But no matter what, the people went to the airport to give him support."



And when the rumors became reality in 2004, those fans came out in force, both in Puerto Rico and in what could be called his second home, New York City.

"New York is a second Puerto Rico," said Narvaez. "There are more than a million Puerto Ricans living there today and there are three times more Puerto Ricans in the United States and the world than on the island. And the history of Puerto Rican boxing originated there, in New York."

NYC was a big part of Trinidad's history as well. Beginning with his 1997 win over Troy Waters, the Puerto Rican had fought four times in the Mecca of Boxing, the arena getting louder and louder with each appearance. When you define a roof being blown off a venue, a clip of a Trinidad fight could be shown, and when you add in the music and drums being played by fans, it was more a celebration than a sporting event.

"There are three performers who sell out Madison Square Garden – Marc Anthony, The Rolling Stones and Tito Trinidad – and two of them are Puerto Rican," former Everlast executive Joe Guzman told me in 2004. "When he fights, it's like the Puerto Rican Day Parade; it's like carnival time. People just can't get enough, and they know it's something special. He may not necessarily be the greatest fighter of all time in Puerto Rico, but he puts people in the seats and they say, 'That's our guy.'"

Their guy was seen by a host of fans and pundits as one of the island's best ever, a special honor considering that Puerto Rico produced the likes of Wilfred Benitez, Wilfredo Gomez, Carlos Ortiz, Hector Camacho, Edwin Rosario and Wilfredo Vazquez, with Miguel Cotto and Ivan Calderon to later make their mark.

But perhaps what set Trinidad apart from his peers was his connection with his fans.

"The people have been with him, watching his career, and people know that he never quits, and that he accepts all challenges during his career," said his father, manager and trainer, Felix Trinidad Sr., before the Mayorga fight. "Out of boxing, he's been a good human being; the people give love to him and he gives back

INIDAD
INIDA
TRI

Mayorga took an insane amount of punishment before the bout was stopped in Round 8.

that love when he signs autographs, when he takes pictures and when he takes time with the fans. I think he deserves that popularity right now. It came with time and with his behavior in and out of the ring, and even though he is not a champion, people still call him champion when they see him."

Mayorga wasn't going to be Hacine Cherifi, though, and speculation ran rampant that the wild-swinging Nicaraguan was the completely wrong matchup for a potentially rusty Trinidad. Sure, "El Matador" was a bull that was there to be hit, but he could crack, and a fighter like Trinidad, who had already been knocked down eight times in his career, didn't need to be caught flush by a haymaker.

But taking on easy marks wasn't the way Trinidad operated, and he had a resume to prove it, with wins over Pernell Whitaker, Camacho, Oscar De La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, William Joppy, Oba Carr and Yori Boy Campas, just to name a few.

"We prefer always going straight to the big fights," said Trinidad, who didn't hesitate to agree to meet the cigarette-smoking Mayorga, a former unified welterweight champ with a pair of victories over Vernon Forrest and just one fight removed from a close decision loss to Cory Spinks in December 2003.

"Tito prepared very well for that fight, and the words of 'El Matador' during the press conferences did not intimidate him," said Narvaez. "Tito wanted to prove that he was still a dominant fighter."

In the lead-up to the fight, Mayorga vowed to let Trinidad hit him on the chin with his now-legendary left hook. Trinidad chuckled.

"If he puts his chin there and I can hit it, let's see if he really can resist my punches," said Trinidad. "I bring big power in my hands, and I will be ready to take him out."

The confidence was there, but if you were playing with boxing math, the odds weren't good, as three of the sport's biggest stars – Roy Jones Jr., Oscar De La Hoya and Mike Tyson – all suffered knockout losses in 2004 before Trinidad and Mayorga stepped between the ropes. Again, Trinidad was not impressed.

"I don't know how they trained for their specific fights," said Trinidad of the aforementioned trio. "I know how I train; I know how I do my things. I haven't had doubts about my fight, even for a second. I'm very positive right now. I came to win. I'm gonna win, and that's the way I feel right now. These things have nothing to do with my fight."

It didn't feel that way once the bell rang in front of 17,046 fans who produced the third-largest gate in MSG history at that time ($4.65 million), as Mayorga was Mayorga and Trinidad wasn't exactly Trinidad, with the Puerto Rican getting tagged several times to the head and body and knocked into the ropes in the early going. But with a minute left in the first round, Trinidad landed his left hook and Mayorga dropped his hands and asked for more. Trinidad obliged, the crowd roared, and a fight had broken out on Eighth Avenue.

"De La Hoya vs. Hopkins didn't live up to its hype as the second coming of [Marvin] Hagler versus [Sugar Ray] Leonard," said HBO's Larry Merchant before the opening bell sounded. "This one might have a better chance of being a facsimile of Hagler versus Hearns."

Those chances had gone up exponentially as the first round ended, with Mayorga on wobbly legs – not from a left hook but a right hand.

"Did anybody say Hagler-Hearns?" Merchant asked, sticking to his guns that this was going to be a special one. But Trinidad's late rally may have cast the die in his favor already.

"Mayorga made a big mistake by downplaying Tito's punch in the first round and inviting him to punch him in the face," said Narvaez. "What an error. Mayorga felt the punch, but he hid that he was hurt and then tried to sneak in some crazy lucky punch in the early part of the fight, but that punch never came."

That didn't stop the 31-year-old Mayorga from trying, though, and as Trinidad looked like his old self early in the second round, the Nicaraguan took the flush shots and kept throwing back, tagging the Garden favorite with enough shots to keep him in the fight and the crowd on their feet.

By Round 3, Trinidad's CompuBox stats were breaking records in terms of most punches landed on Mayorga in a single round, but with "El Matador" it only takes one, and with a little less than a minute left in the frame, a looping right hand forced Trinidad's glove to the canvas, prompting referee Steve Smoger to call it a knockdown. Unbothered by the bump in the road, Trinidad marched forward behind his jab, only to take more haymakers before the bell sounded.

In Rounds 4 and 5, Trinidad's laser-like shots continued to strafe Mayorga's head, and while the wild man from Managua never stopped trying, the gap between the two began to widen. The puncher's chance was still on Mayorga's side, but Trinidad was careful enough to not get caught with anything that would end his night prematurely.

"Tito was always a fighter who started out cold," said Narvaez. "But by the fifth round, Mayorga was too tired."

He also had to deal with a cut under his left eye, and as Round 6 began, Trinidad raised his hand and pounded his chest, seemingly feeling that the end was near for his foe. Mayorga did hang tough in the sixth and seventh, drawing respect, if not love, from the packed house as he battled fatigue, blood, a couple low blows and Trinidad's legal punches, but at this point, it was Trinidad's fight to lose.

"What an amazing seven rounds of combat," said HBO blow-by-blow man Jim Lampley, and in the eighth, it all came crashing down for Mayorga, who was dropped for the first time in his career by a body shot with 1:25 to go in the round. Mayorga rose at the count of nine and resumed swinging haymakers, only to be put down with a right hand with 55 seconds left. Trinidad jumped up on the ropes in celebration, but his opponent rose again. But there would be no reprieve, as a barrage of power shots sent Mayorga to the canvas a third and final time, referee Steve Smoger halting the contest at 2:39 of Round 8.

"I've been in tough, long wars before, but I dominated this fight," Trinidad said in the ring after his 42nd pro victory. "We knew he could take a punch and he took a lot of my punches, but that was bad for him. I knew I could keep that pace up, and thanks to my discipline, I did what I did."

At the time of the stoppage, Trinidad, who landed 66 percent of his power punches (218 of 329) according to CompuBox numbers, led on all scorecards: 68-64, 68-64 and 67-64.

Those are the numbers, the nuts and bolts of a memorable night. But a Felix Trinidad fight, especially in Madison Square Garden, was never about the cut-and-dried result. It was about how he made you feel.

"He's truly their hero, someone they can associate with," said Guzman. "He's like their Joe DiMaggio. He's just a warm human being and it comes across – he's real."

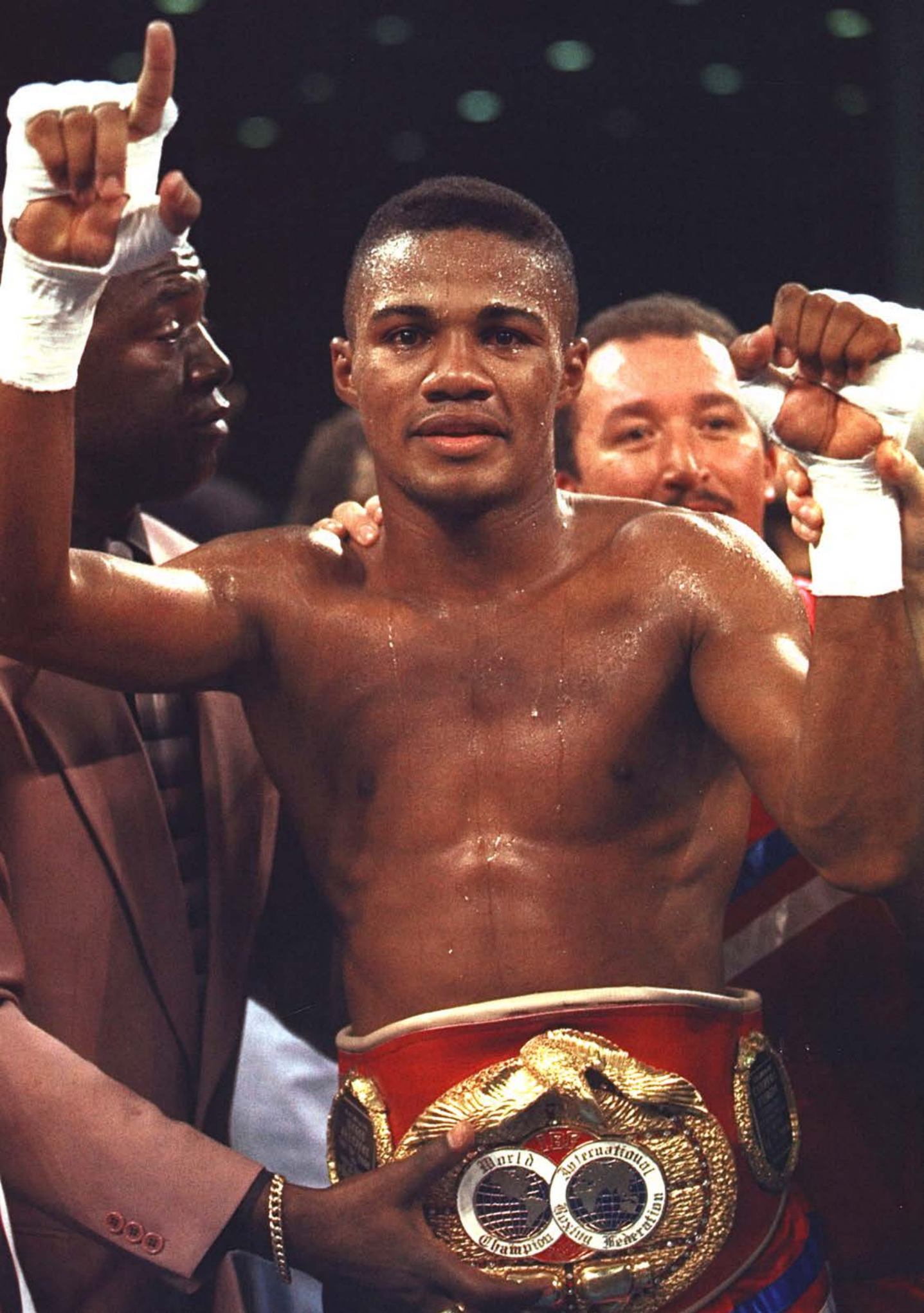
"The Garden was packed," said Narvaez. "It was Tito Trinidad's second home. The crowd wanted to see their star shine again, and he did. He received a standing ovation from the crowd, then [they] packed the streets of New York to celebrate."

They did celebrate, on into the night. Their hero was back.

And while there was no "Happy Birthday" sung to Trinidad, who had turned 31 nine months earlier, the scene in The Garden was reminiscent of the night Roberto Duran returned from the dead on his birthday to beat Davey Moore for the junior middleweight title in 1983.

Sure, Trinidad was in with a defensively deficient fighter whose best days were at 147 pounds, not 160, but it didn't matter, not to the pundits who believed Trinidad could now make another run at middleweight gold, or to the fans who were just happy to hear Michael Buffer announce to the world once more, "From Cupey Alto, Puerto Rico, Felix 'Tito' Trinidad!"

AL BELLO


World
Champion
International
Boxing Federation

GREATEST HITS: FELIX TRINIDAD

TRINIDAD EVOLVED INTO ONE OF PUERTO RICO'S MOST ACCOMPLISHED AND BELOVED CHAMPIONS DURING AN EXTENDED WELTERWEIGHT REIGN AND EXPLOSIVE STOPS AT 154 AND 160 POUNDS

By **Anson Wainwright**

Felix Trinidad is the people's champion on a boxing-crazy island. When "Tito" fought during his heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s, Puerto Rico came to a standstill.

The future three-division titleholder was born in Cupey Alto, just outside the capital city of San Juan, on January 10, 1973.

"I've been around boxing all my life because of my father, Felix Sr., who was an amateur and then pro fighter," Trinidad told The Ring through Fernando Gaztambide. "I used to go to his fights in coliseums and fields. When he retired, together with my cousin Juan 'Popo' Guzman, who died many years ago, they set up a gym that they called 'Club Cupey,' and there were several boxers from the neighborhood and nearby towns. I've always been in the gym since I can remember."

Trinidad began his amateur career at the age of 9. He went 51-6 before turning professional two months after his 17th birthday, in March 1990.

Over the next couple of years, Trinidad quietly went about his business moving his record to 19-0 (16 knockouts), then met Maurice Blocker for the IBF welterweight title. It proved to be something of a coming-out party for the power-puncher, who knocked Blocker out cold in two rounds.

He scored hugely impressive wins over the likes of Hector Camacho (UD 12), Yori Boy Campas (TKO 4), Oba Carr (TKO 8) and Pernell Whitaker (UD 12). All the while, his status among the best fighters in the world grew.

In September 1999, he controversially unified major belts with fellow boxing superstar Oscar De La Hoya (MD 12), who held the WBC title.

The fighting pride of Puerto Rico ultimately made 15 successful defenses of the IBF crown, bettered only by Henry Armstrong, who holds the division record for title defenses (19). Trinidad's title reign of six years and nine months is the longest in the welterweight division's history.

With nothing left to conquer at 147 pounds and having extreme difficulty making weight, Trinidad vacated his titles and moved up to junior middleweight, where his wrecking-ball fists continued to wreak havoc.

In the 154-pound division, he challenged previously unbeaten 1996 Olympic gold medalist and reigning WBA titleholder David Reid in March 2000.

LEFT: AL BELLO; JOSE JIMENEZ

Trinidad poses with Puerto Rican actress Rosie Perez.

"When he knocked me down [in Round 3], I stood up quickly. I was behind, but this is not over. I was still in the fight, in good condition," said Trinidad. "My dad told me at the end of the round, 'I told you that Reid's right hand was going to land if you do not protect your face. Raise your left hand and cover your face, protect yourself and attack.' And thank God, I was able to hurt Reid and knocked him down four times in total (once in Round 7 and three times in Round 11) to win the fight."

A mandatory title defense against Mamadou Thiam (TKO 3) was followed by a unification showdown with IBF kingpin Fernando Vargas, another unbeaten Olympian. Trinidad got off to a terrific start when he dropped Vargas twice in the opening round, but somehow the American was able to survive and worked his way back into the fight, putting Trinidad on the canvas in the fourth. Trinidad closed strongly and dropped Vargas three times en route to scoring a rousing 12th-round knockout.

Trinidad again moved up in weight to face WBA middleweight titleholder William Joppy in the semifinal of Don King's middleweight tournament, scoring a fifth-round stoppage to thrill his fans at Madison Square Garden in May 2001.

In the final, he met wily veteran Bernard Hopkins for undisputed champion status. The fight was scheduled to take place on September 15, 2001, but the date was scrapped after the terrorist attacks on 9/11.

"The hotel where I was located was just two blocks from where the attacks took place," Trinidad vividly recalled. "I remember that we were in the room with the masseur, my father and others from the group; we saw on television about the Twin Towers and it was like, 'Wow!' We were surprised. The hotel called us so that everyone went down through security for fear that other buildings would be attacked."

Ultimately, the fight took place on September 29.

"We knew that [Hopkins] was a boxer with a lot of experience, a lot of skill. He was very intelligent," said Trinidad. "He took great care of my left hook; he never lowered his right hand, because he knew my hook was strong and I could land it.

"I would have preferred the fight to be on September 15. If the fight was that day, Bernard Hopkins could not beat me. I cannot detract from Hopkins – great champion, fighter, legend – but the change of date affected me. Honestly, I couldn't fight; my physical condition in the ring diminished much earlier than his condition. I ran out of that energy you need, which I always had in my other fights.

"In [Round 10], he hurt me, and in Round 12 he sent me to the canvas and my father threw in the towel and got in the ring, and I really wasn't against his decision. I was a little dizzy, but it was a great fight and I lost to a great champion."

There was talk of a rematch, but it never came to anything.

"Hopkins never wanted to give me a rematch," he said. "We asked him once and he never wanted it."

There were other fights he wished he could have had ...

"There were fights that could have happened, but they didn't happen, but not because I had said no," he explained. "Don King was the promoter. There were fights signed with Chavez Sr. when I was a welterweight champion. I remember one day that Chavez told me and my father that he was never going to face me, but for whatever reason, he faced De La Hoya. But he didn't want to fight with me.

"One fighter that I would have liked to face was Terry Norris – a fight that was about to happen and did not happen. He didn't want to fight me at 154 pounds. He will have his reasons."

Trinidad fought just four more times and retired for the third and final time after losing to Roy Jones Jr. in a catchweight bout in January 2008.

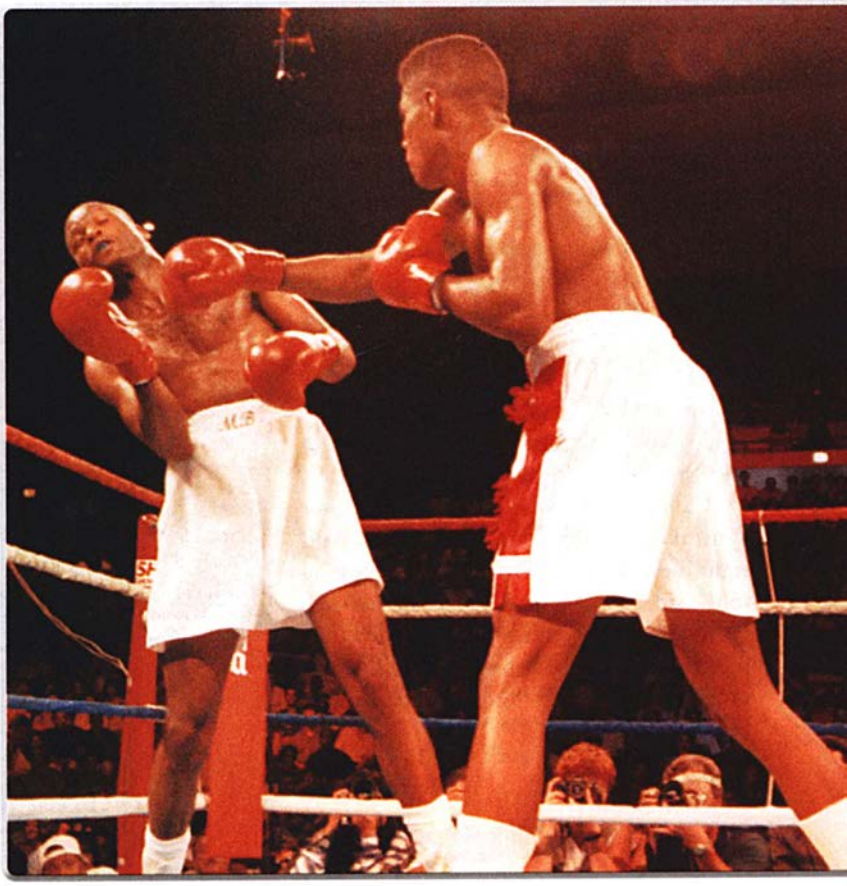
Trinidad, now 48, is married to Sharon and has five daughters. He lives a quiet and peaceful life in Cupey Alto. However, he is embroiled in a well-publicized court case with Banco Popular that pertains to much of his career income – in the region of $86 million – being invested without his consent into bond portfolios.

"I dedicate my time to my family and to the case with Banco Popular," he said. "[They] have been very hard on me, very abusive to me. We know that God is with me. All those responsible promised us and have done things that should not be done to any human being. The deception has been tremendous since that moment and all these years that have passed."

Here's what he had to say about six of his most memorable nights in the ring:

MAURICE BLOCKER

June 19, 1993, Sports Arena, San Diego, California • Titles: IBF welterweight



"[My manager] Yamil Chade and [Don] King (who also promoted Blocker) were talking because my team knew I was ready for a title shot, and we pushed for that fight.

"I remember being super pumped-up. Training super hard, to tell you the truth. We watched some tapes and knew that the victory was around the corner. Blocker was a good, strong fighter, but my determination and plan was just great. He had a great jab and we worked to counter that. The victory was so good; my people were very happy. I thought I was dreaming. Hard work pays off.

"It meant everything, and more importantly it was my father's first world title as a trainer. He trained some boxers, so he was so proud of me and I was so proud of him. Lovely moment."

RESULT: TRINIDAD KO 2

HECTOR CAMACHO

January 29, 1994, MGM Grand, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF welterweight

"The fight with Camacho, we knew we were going to face a great fighter. At that time, he was a champion in three weight categories and we knew that he was a boxer with many tools and tricks – left-handed, uncomfortable [style to fight] – but I was fully prepared for Macho Camacho. We knew it was not easy but that we were going to have the victory.

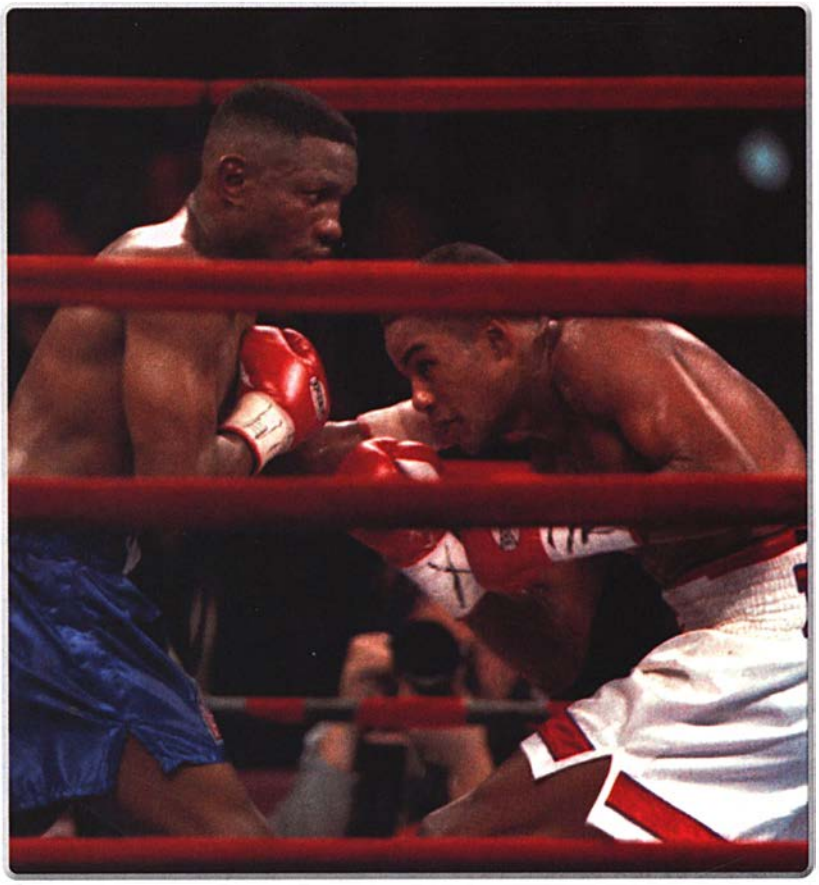
"He was always talking smack, but I was never into that. My mindset was to train and win. I remember a public training day in Vegas. When I came down heading to the ring, he began talking trash about me and my team, but we just ignored him and kept focused on the fight. My dad always told me to talk using my punches in the ring.

"It was my first title fight with no KO victory. Some fans and reporters were telling me that Camacho would be my first high-caliber fight. Camacho at that time had like 11 world title fights, I believe. He was an elusive, crafty and resourceful opponent. I learned to stay focused, to listen to your corner, and things will go in your favor. I was cut early in the fight but was not worried. I just followed instructions and delivered. I did not KO him, but I made it a good fight."

RESULT: TRINIDAD UD 12

PERNELL WHITAKER

February 20, 1999, Madison Square Garden, New York • Titles: IBF welterweight



"As we did with each and every one of our opponents, we were very prepared with excellent sparring similar to Whitaker, who fought similar to Camacho. The training was very good. We had a physical trainer and my father in the afternoon at the gym to have the conditioning to fight 12 rounds with my mouth closed – great stamina.

"Camacho moved a lot in the ring, but Whitaker fought you face-to-face. And right there he got down very low, stepping to the side, and was always half on his side. He dodged everything like he had radar in some way. Very talented. I picked my punches wisely with him. Difficult to hit, but I won well."

RESULT: TRINIDAD UD 12

OSCAR DE LA HOYA

September 18, 1999, Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF/WBC welterweight

"We were undefeated. It was the fight that we had been waiting for a long time. It was my 15th IBF welterweight defense. De La Hoya was rising in weight. He did not start at welterweight; he started at 130 [and moved up to] 135, 140 and 147 pounds. He became champion against Whitaker in a close fight, and our fight, Puerto Rico against Mexico, was near.

"I knew that he was afraid of my punch. During the fight, I was looking for him all the time and I threw lots of punches. He hardly threw any punches; he moved a lot. There were many even rounds at the beginning of the fight, the first half, and at the end of the fight I was on top of him all the time. You saw the last rounds, the championship rounds, I won them quite clearly. In the championship rounds he decided to run, and that's not good for a unification bout.

"In January 2000, there was a meeting where Don King, Bob Arum, De La Hoya's team, my team, De La Hoya's lawyers, the HBO people – everyone was there [to discuss a rematch], and the only one who was not there at that meeting was Oscar. Everything was basically negotiated. I was there, I can talk about it. If he is there, the rematch will most likely be signed.

"We wanted what De La Hoya [was guaranteed and paid] in the first fight, logically, [to be guaranteed for me] in the second fight. The [lead] promoter was Arum in the first, and [we felt that] Don King should promote the second fight, and I think it was fair. We wanted to make a pay-per-view divided into 50-50 profits; we know that he made more money than me in the first pay-per-view. The fight never happened because De La Hoya never wanted to get into a second fight with me."

RESULT: TRINIDAD MD 12

FERNANDO VARGAS

December 2, 2000, Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas • Titles: IBF/WBA junior middleweight

"Fernando Vargas was an incredible fight. Vargas, because he is not going to be my friend in the ring, became like an enemy. He did not look at me. On one occasion, I went to shake his hand and he did not greet me.

"He is the same boxer who years ago, when he was in the 1996 Olympics, I was there with my brother, Alex 'El Nene' Sanchez and other athletes supporting the athletes of Puerto Rico. I found out that Vargas wanted to meet me. We were in a stadium during the day and he sees me from afar and runs over to me and gives me a hug, and that day we talked for several minutes. He talked about De La Hoya. He asked me that day – I was a world champion and he was an amateur boxer – to please beat De La Hoya, and I told him not to worry, that will be the case.

"He was strong and young, and I went to knock him out quickly because I knew that my hands were going to connect with him. We had studied it with my father. But he surprised me when he recovered from the knockdowns and later hurt me. But little by little, I managed to put him down. I did not see that blow [that dropped me in Round 4], but thanks to my conditioning and dedication, I was able to continue with courage and energy and take advantage again. His conditioning for the fight surprised me; I had to do a lot to win. I give him credit for his strength and the great fight that we had. Puerto Rico vs. Mexico is always exciting. A fight for the books. People still ask me about that fight."

RESULT: TRINIDAD TKO 12

WILLIAM JOPPY

May 12, 2001, Madison Square Garden, New York • Titles: WBA middleweight

"I remember the fans going crazy, the hype, the sponsors. It was something incredible to see how hard work pays off. Puerto Ricans from all over the United States and from the island were there to support me. Also, some fans from Colombia, Mexico, Dominican Republic – you name it – were there. I was fighting to be a three-division world champion. That was a big deal because some of the greats in Puerto Rico, like [Wilfredo] Gomez, [Wilfredo] Vazquez, [Hector] Camacho and [Wilfred] Benitez, were already three-division world champions. That's an elite list.

"We prepared 100 percent for that fight because it was a tournament at 160 pounds and winning it made you undisputed champion. It was the Sugar Ray Robinson tournament, a very important tournament that helped give more exposure at 160 pounds. We saw that opportunity at 160. I was doing well, but 154 pounds was kind of uncomfortable for me. We went to 160 against Joppy, a respectable world champion, good boxer, pretty strong hands. Thank God I was able to perform great and win in three weight categories, and we did it thanks to God, my father and the rest of the team and my dedication."

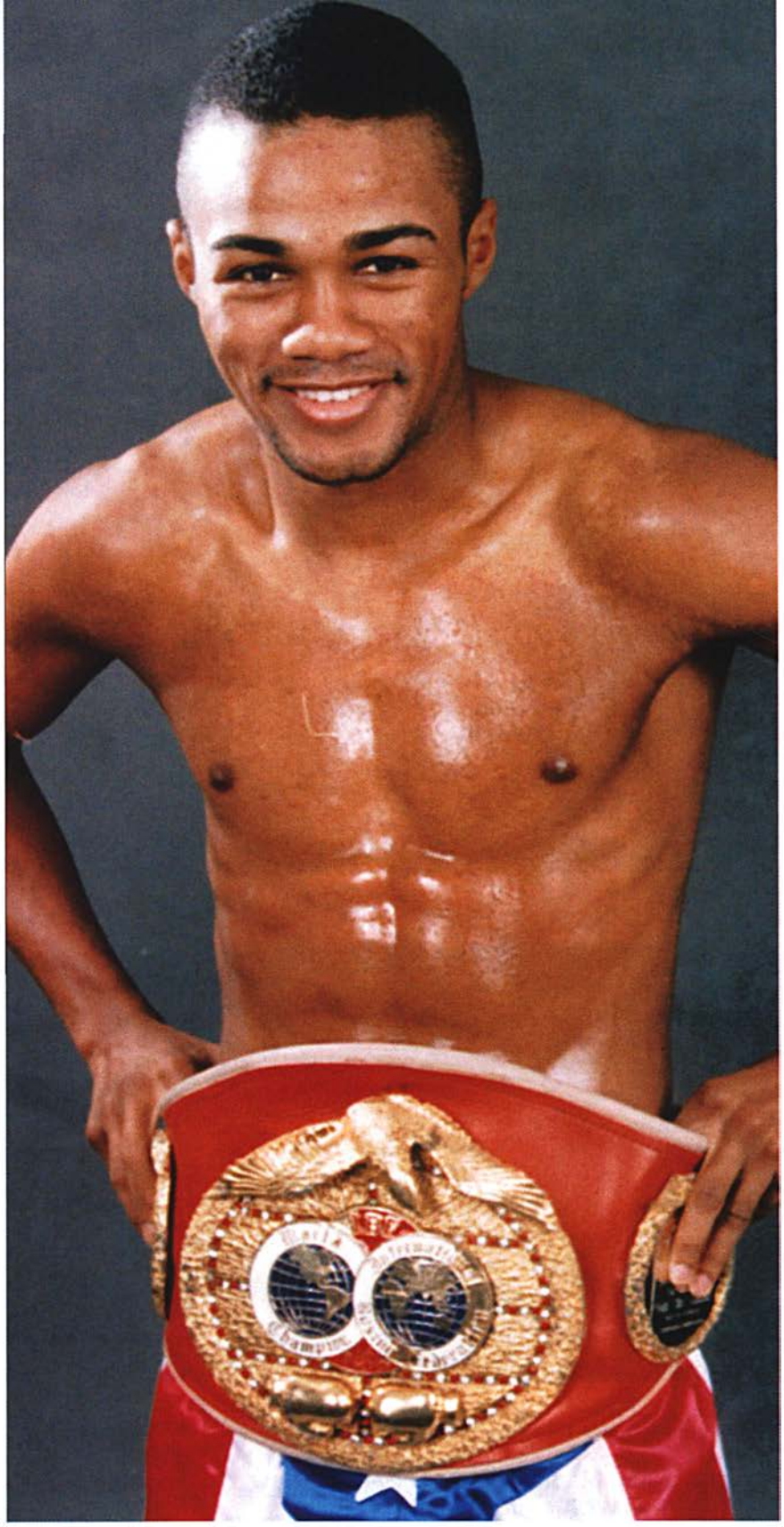
RESULT: TRINIDAD TKO 5

Fernando Gaztambide helped coordinate and translate this feature. The Ring appreciates his assistance. Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter @AnsonWainwright.

SUGAR TALKS TITO

By **Shane Mosley**

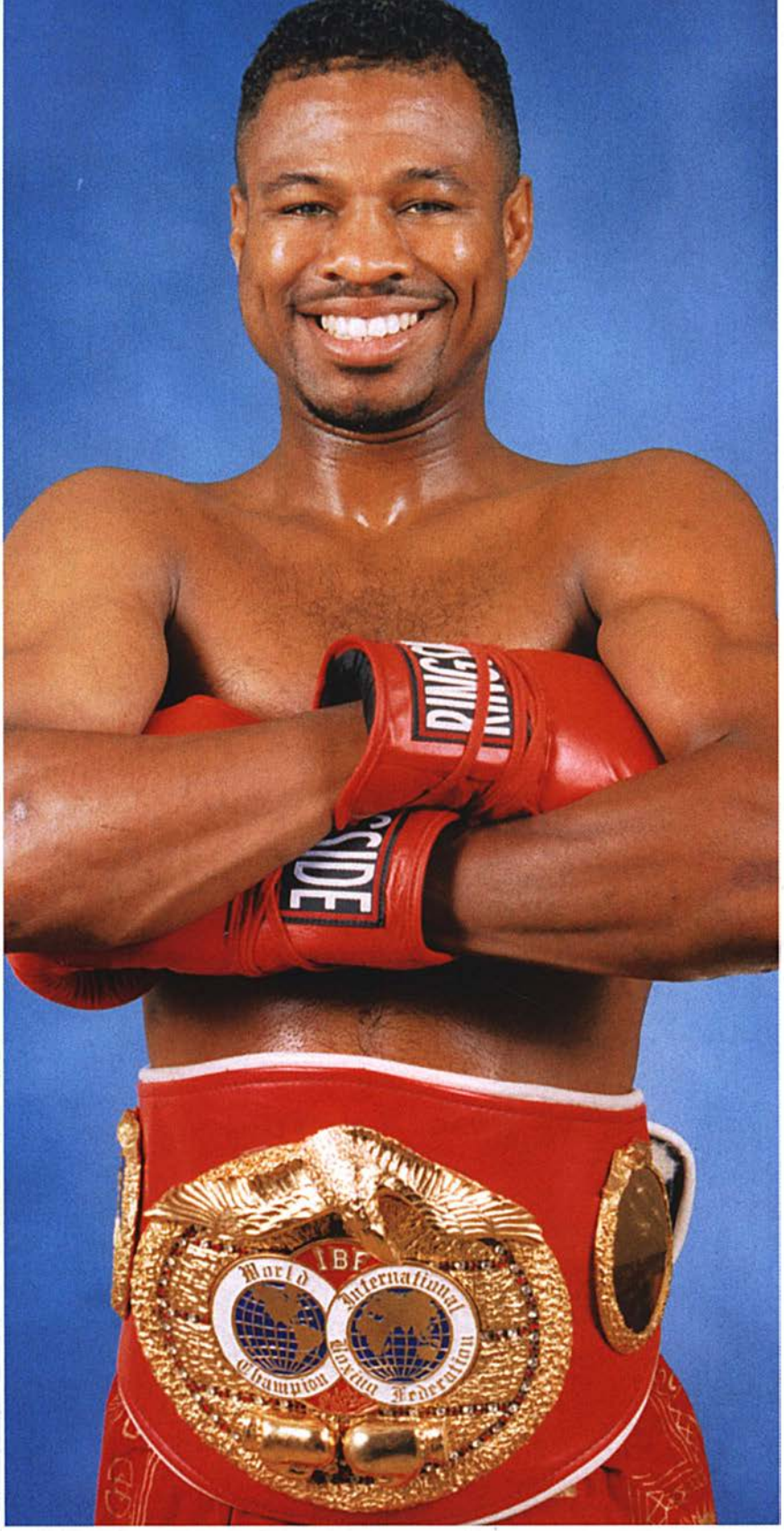
SUGAR SHANE MOSLEY OFFERS HIS THOUGHTS ON **FELIX TRINIDAD'S** ABILITIES AND PREDICTS THE OUTCOME OF A MYTHICAL MATCHUP BETWEEN THEM



Tito Trinidad was revered all over the world because he was a very aggressive and exciting fighter. Fans knew if Tito went down or if his father slapped him across the face in the corner, then he was coming back with more vengeance, more fury, and he wasn't afraid.

Trinidad was so focused on the attack and the offense that he would sometimes forget about defense. He would be a bit too relaxed, a bit too confident, and elite-level fighters will find a way to get you. But it was never a good thing to knock Tito down, because he would become a different fighter. The excitement around him was always so high. You would see him hit the floor and think to yourself, "This is it," because most of the time, when you get a fighter down and hurt him, there's the strong possibility that you can hurt him again or knock him out. But in Trinidad's case, he would get caught early, when he was still warming up, and all you did was wake him up. And it would be all downhill for the other fighter after that. When you think about it, it would probably have been better to knock Tito down late.

The technique he had for his height was superb. A lot of people would expect a fighter with Tito's height to be a mobile boxer, use his range, stay away from danger, but he was just the opposite. He would welcome danger, and that's why people loved him so much. He didn't play it safe and he was the warrior type. Tito would fight anybody, and his mentality, his thought process



was, "I'm going to knock you out. I'm going to get you." We're similar in that sense, and that's why we're both so liked by the boxing world.

If we'd met at 147, it would have been a great fight. Oscar gave Trinidad a lot of trouble by boxing him and he didn't get hit very much. Now, we know that my footspeed is a bit quicker than Oscar's and my handspeed is about the same. I sparred with Oscar when we were kids; we sparred in the Olympic training center. We grew up together. I also worked with Genaro Hernandez, "Chicanito," so I sparred a lot of lanky guys with big left hooks, body shots – the same type of style that Trinidad had.

My speed and punch power allows me to get Tito on the deck at any time. It's not like I couldn't hurt him. The extra speed and power means I could get the job done, but, at the same time, Trinidad has an advantage over me in that he's taller. When I fought taller guys, I was susceptible to right hands, like with Vernon Forrest. Trinidad had a decent right hand, and if he can follow that with a left hook, it could be goodnight.

It sure would have been a crowd-pleaser.

I actually came close to fighting Trinidad at junior middleweight, but I lost to Winky Wright. Winky, who's a lot bigger, got the Tito fight and beat him pretty easily. At 154 it would have been harder for me than at 147, because '54 was more Trinidad's weight and '47 was more my weight. I moved up to 154 because the competition was there: Fernando Vargas, Oscar again, and it just made business sense. It wasn't my weight class, but I still won the world title there.

But if the Tito fight had happened, it would have been fireworks. Trinidad would never have stopped trying to get me, but, at the same time, I'd be trying to get him too. I'd have been moving a lot, because we saw in Tito's career that he had trouble hitting a moving target. Oscar gave him a lot of problems, so he would have found it hard against me too, especially with my speed. If I got Tito down, he's going to come back at me with that left hook and I'd know it was coming. I'd be prepared for that punch coming back at me.

But anything can happen in boxing, anyone can go down, so you never know.

The great "Tito" Trinidad pictured in his native Puerto Rico in 2019.

BEST OF THE BEST

HOW DO **TRINIDAD'S** OUTSTANDING RING ACCOMPLISHMENTS COMPARE TO THOSE OF THE GREATEST BOXERS EVER TO HAIL FROM THE BOXING-PROUD ISLAND OF PUERTO RICO?

By **Lee Groves**

More than most sports, boxing is the vehicle through which the nations of the world – regardless of size or economic clout – can symbolically flex their muscles and proudly bask in the accomplishments of their citizens. To date, 82 countries lay claim to at least one champion, and Puerto Rico – a U.S. territory whose 3,515 square miles are slightly smaller than that of Connecticut's and whose reported population of 3.3 million is comparable to Utah's – can claim to be one of "The Sweet Science's" most potent juggernauts.

Puerto Rico's championship legacy began with Sixto Escobar, who captured the undisputed bantamweight championship in 1936 after having won the NBA and NYSAC versions a year earlier, and it continues 85 years later with WBO strawweight titleholder Wilfredo Mendez. Since 2000, at least one Puerto Rican has held a widely recognized boxing championship for 7,324 of a possible 7,945 days (92.2 percent) as of October 1, 2021, and the record was perfect from January 1, 2000, until May 5, 2012, the day Floyd Mayweather Jr. outpointed Miguel Cotto to win the WBA junior middleweight title.

Felix Trinidad did his part to create his island's unbroken 12-year stretch of titular control by capturing the WBA junior middleweight title in March 2000 (UD 12 David Reid), notching defenses against Mamadou Thiam (TKO 3) and Fernando Vargas (TKO 12), then adding his third divisional championship against then-WBA middleweight king William Joppy in May 2001 (TKO 5) before losing to Bernard Hopkins four months later. But many of his best moments occurred in the 1990s during his long stay as IBF welterweight champion. His smooth, long-range boxing helped set up the blistering combinations and the savage hooks that resulted in a 42-3 (35 KOs) record and a spot in the International Boxing Hall of Fame's Class of 2014. His destructiveness was exceeded only by his effervescent personality, a trait that helped him become one of his nation's most beloved figures.

As great as Trinidad was, is he Puerto Rico's greatest fighter? A few months ago, The Ring asked whether Julio Cesar Chavez was the best Mexican boxer of all time, and despite the long list of candidates, it was obvious that Chavez stood at the pinnacle. Here, the answer isn't as clear, not because Trinidad isn't a worthy candidate, but because of the names against whom he must compete.

Before detailing that roster, here's why Trinidad is worthy of being in the conversation.

- **Trinidad boasts history's longest uninterrupted welterweight title reign (six years, eight months).**
- **His 15 IBF title defenses are the second most behind Henry Armstrong's 19 of the undisputed championship.**
- **A 20-1 (16 KOs) record in widely recognized alphabet title fights, including 16-0 (13 KOs) at welterweight.**
- **At 20 years 165 days, he remains the third-youngest Puerto Rican individual to win a widely recognized alphabet title, and he achieved it at the fourth-youngest age (Wilfred Benitez was 17 years 180 days when he dethroned Antonio Cervantes in March 1976, Edwin Rosario was 20 years 52 days when he outpointed Jose Luis Ramirez in May 1983, and Benitez was 20 years 129 days when he decisioned Carlos Palomino in January 1979).**
- **Trinidad is the fourth-youngest welterweight titlist behind Pipino Cuevas (18 years 207 days), Benitez (20 years 129 days) and Dixie Kid (20 years 134 days).**
- **Logged a 12-3 (7 KOs) mark against opponents who won belts from the four major sanctioning bodies during their careers.**
- **He is one of six Puerto Ricans to win at least three divisional championships (Benitez, Hector Camacho, Wilfredo Gomez, Wilfredo Vazquez Sr. and Cotto were the others) and he was a unified champion at 147 and 154.**
- **He defeated three Olympic gold medalists in Pernell Whitaker (1984 lightweight), Oscar De La Hoya (1992 lightweight) and David Reid (1996 light middleweight).**
- **He bested five undefeated opponents in world title fights: The 56-0 Luis Ramon "Yori Boy" Campas (TKO 4), the 32-0 Oba Carr (TKO 8), the 31-0 Oscar De La Hoya (MD 12), the 14-0 David Reid (UD 12) and the 20-0 Fernando Vargas (TKO 12).**
- **He was named the 2000 Fighter of the Year by The Ring and the Boxing Writers Association of America.**

As impressive as this resume is, there are caveats:

- **He has a 3-2 record against fellow**

GLADYS VEGA

IBHOF inductees and none of his victories were scored inside the distance (UD 12 Camacho, UD 12 Whitaker, MD 12 De La Hoya; the two losses were Hopkins TKO 12 and Winky Wright UD 12) and that record will drop to 3-3 should Roy Jones Jr., who won by unanimous decision, be voted in as expected. It can also be argued that Camacho and Whitaker were past their primes when they fought Trinidad, and his majority decision over "The Golden Boy" was highly controversial. The two never fought a rematch, though Trinidad claimed in September 2021 that eight unsuccessful overtures were made.

- Seven months after his spectacular eighth-round TKO over Ricardo Mayorga in October 2004 – his first fight after nearly two-and-a-half years away from the ring – Trinidad, the 8-to-5 favorite, was on the wrong end of an astonishingly one-sided boxing lesson by Wright, who was making his middleweight debut after reigning as a unified champion at 154.

- He lost three of his final five fights after starting his career with 40 consecutive victories, including the loss to Hopkins as a 2-to-1 betting favorite.

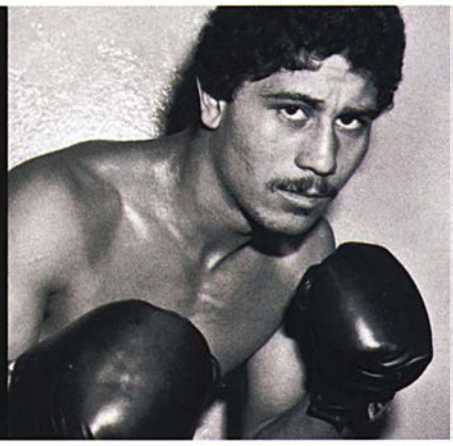
Trinidad's competition for the number one spot includes the following (in alphabetical order):

WILFRED BENITEZ (1973-1990, 53-8-1, 31 KOS):

The man who alternated between "El Radar," "The Dragon" and "The Bible of Boxing" was a prodigy whose reputation was built on defensive wizardry, pinpoint counterpunching and underrated power. As previously mentioned, he remains the youngest boxer ever to win a widely recognized world championship, and he broke the mark by more than a full year against a future Hall of Famer in Cervantes. He is often called "The Fifth King" for his fights with Sugar Ray Leonard (who won by TKO 15), Roberto Duran (UD 15) and Thomas Hearns (L MD 15) but is excluded because a points loss to Mustafa Hamsho in June 1983 ruined plans to challenge undisputed middleweight monarch Marvelous Marvin Hagler and a chance to become the first boxer ever to win four divisional championships. Benitez was 9-2 (3 KOs) in widely recognized title fights, 3-2 (0 KOs) against fellow Hall of Famers and 7-4 (1 KO) against men who have won alphabet belts during their careers, but those marks could've been better had his prime extended past his mid-20s. Unfortunately for him, his overreliance on natural talent resulted in notoriously lax training habits, and after his dissection of Duran in January 1982, his record was just 9-7 (3 KOs), including three KO defeats. How much better would Benitez have fared against former titlist Davey Moore in July 1984 (an injury-marred second-round stoppage loss) or future champion Matthew Hilton in February 1986 (a ninth-round KO loss) had he extended his prime by being more dedicated to his craft? We'll never know, but because his best days were so brilliant, Benitez was voted into the IBHOF in 1996, and, at 37 years 280 days, was the youngest to be present at his induction ceremony and the second youngest overall behind posthumous honoree Salvador Sanchez, who would have been 32 years 142 days had he been present at his 1991 induction. (Class of 2020 member Andre Ward, who would've been 36 years 120 days had his induction ceremony been staged on schedule, now holds the mark).

IVAN CALDERON (2001-2012, 35-3-1, 6 KOS):

Like Benitez, "The Iron Boy" was one of his generation's defensive grandmasters but, unlike Benitez, he maximized his time at the summit as he held an alphabet championship almost continuously for more than seven years (he was WBO strawweight champion from May 2003 to April 2007 and, after vacating the 105-pound strap, was WBO junior flyweight king from August 2007 to August 2010). He was 19-3-1 (3 KOs) in widely recognized world title fights, registering 11 successful defenses at 105 and six more at 108 while beating nine men who had held a title at some point in their careers. While commentators criticized his constant movement, his lack of power and the sameness of every round, Calderon was the ultimate ring general who banked rounds on the scorecards. One look at his score lines, especially between 2003-07, illustrates his sustained strategic command, and



From left to right: Wilfred Benitez, Ivan Calderon, Hector Camacho, Miguel Cotto, Wilfredo Gomez and Carlos Ortiz.

he was so comfortable in the heat of battle that he injected extra sizzle into his defensive moves, so much so that audiences occasionally shouted "Ole!" in tribute. Although his long-term excellence earned him a spot on the IBHOF's Modern ballot several years ago, he has yet to be voted in.

HECTOR CAMACHO (1980-2010, 79-6-3, 38 KOS):

At his best, "The Macho Man" merged the defensive prowess of Benitez, the movement of Calderon, the handspeed and killer instinct of American contemporary Leonard and an electric personality that lit up TV screens and live audiences unlike any of his predecessors or successors. His CBS-televised TKO over Louis Loy in July 1982 introduced Camacho's creativity, charisma and otherworldly skills to a national audience, and five more network TV wins set the stage for Camacho's first title fight against two-time former champion Rafael "Bazooka" Limon, who was too old and too slow to cope with the youngster's abundant gifts and was stopped in five. The Bayamon product continued to dazzle against Rafael Solis in his only 130-pound title defense in November 1983, and he reached his zenith in August 1985 when he outpointed Jose Luis Ramirez to capture the WBC lightweight title. Ten months after conquering Ramirez, his fistic trajectory was permanently altered by an Edwin Rosario hook in Round 5 that introduced Camacho to the very real possibility of defeat and all its ramifications. Although Camacho won a disputed split decision over "Chapo," Camacho became far less "Macho" as he redistributed his talents toward self-preservation, and while that soured his public persona, he reveled in wearing the black hat and still won his first 38 fights before Greg Haugen broke the string in February 1991. Meanwhile, Camacho's chaotic life outside the ring chipped away at his gifts and Father Time inflicted even more damage. Still, Camacho created a legacy deemed worthy of IBHOF enshrinement in 2016: He added a third divisional championship by controversially outpointing the comebacking Ray Mancini in 1989, amassed a 10-4-2 (2 KOs) record against fellow world titlists and a 9-4 (2 KOs) mark in world title bouts (including a points loss to Trinidad in 1994), and he was never knocked out in his three-decade career.

MIGUEL COTTO (2001-2017, 41-6, 33 KOS):

Although he failed to medal at the 2000 Olympics, Cotto's technical skill and superlative hooks inspired many to choose him as the man who would succeed Trinidad as the face of Puerto Rican boxing. Most athletes would have buckled under those expectations, but the stone-faced Cotto stood strong and repeatedly validated his supporters. Not only did Cotto live up to the hype, he exceeded it by becoming the first (and still only) Puerto Rican to win widely recognized championships in four weight classes, the last of which was achieved againstThe Ring and WBC middleweight king Sergio Martinez the night before Trinidad was inducted into the IBHOF. Cotto amassed a 20-6 (16 KOs) mark in championship contests, a 16-6 (12 KOs) ledger versus men who have won belts during their career, a 14-5 (11 KOs) in title fights away from Puerto Rico (all were staged in the U.S.) and was one of a few fighters in his era to score KO wins in every available round. That said, Cotto was 1-1 against current Hall of Famers (UD 12 Mosley, L UD 12 Mayweather), and that could drop to 2-3 should Martinez (TKO 10), Manny Pacquiao (L TKO 12) and Canelo Alvarez (L UD 12) earn enshrinement. Many were surprised Cotto wasn't inducted into the IBHOF in his first year of eligibility, but given his record and his legacy, he shouldn't have to wait too much longer for his elevation.

WILFREDO GOMEZ (1974-1989, 44-3-1, 42 KOS):

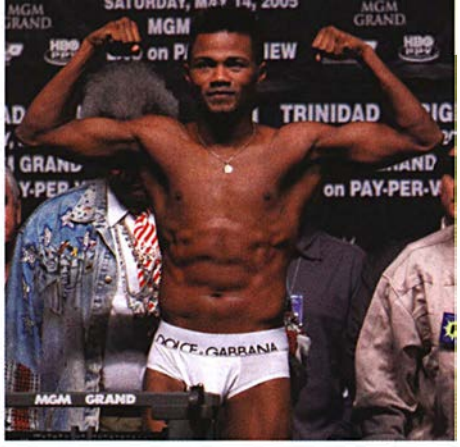
The Santurce native was nicknamed "Bazooka" for the overwhelming power in his fists, and at 122, there were none better than this 1995 IBHOF inductee. Following a surprising draw against Panamanian Jacinto Fuentes in Panama in his pro debut (a blemish he avenged by KO five fights later), he won the WBC junior featherweight title with an off-the-floor 12th-round TKO over Dong Kyun Yum that began a

THE RING MAGAZINE; COTTO: AL BELLO; GOMEZ, ORTIZ: BETTMANN

historic six-year reign. During that reign, he set a record that may never be broken: 17 successful title defenses, all by knockout. He shattered Roberto Duran's previous mark of 10 and his 32-fight KO streak between December 1974 and June 1981 is among the longest in ring annals. Other marks in his favor: His 11-1 (11 KOs) record in title fights away from Puerto Rico and a 9-3 (7 KOs) ledger against fellow titlists. Gomez went on to win championships at 126 and 130 against Juan Laporte (UD 12) and Rocky Lockridge (a highly controversial MD 15) respectively, and his 20-3 (18 KOs) mark in world title fights speaks loudly for him. He has a 2-2 (2 KOs) record against fellow Hall of Famers, and while critics will point to Gomez's KO losses against Sanchez and Azumah Nelson, supporters would counter with his KO wins over Lupe Pintor and Carlos Zarate. At his peak, Gomez boxed and slugged with equal effectiveness, making him must-see TV for purists and action addicts alike. Although he left 122 nearly 40 years ago, many still consider him the division's gold standard.

CARLOS ORTIZ (1955-1972, 61-7-1, 30 KOS):

Born in Ponce, Ortiz and his family moved to New York City when he was a child, and thanks to his numerous street fights, he joined the Madison Square Boys' Club at a police officer's suggestion and developed into one of the city's outstanding amateurs despite having a little more than 40 fights. That success continued into the pros as he crushed previous conqueror Kenny Lane in two rounds to win the world junior welterweight title, a championship that had been dormant for 13 years. Ortiz notched two defenses against the 31-0 Battling Torres and the 102-2-7 Duilio Loi before losing the championship to Loi by majority decision in Milan and dropping the rubber match eight months later by unanimous decision at the same locale. In April 1962, Ortiz became one of a select few to move down in weight to win his second divisional title, and he did so



by comprehensively outpointing long-reigning lightweight champion Joe Brown. Over the next six years, Ortiz produced nine successful defenses over two reigns, with his best wins coming against Flash Elorde (KO 14, TKO 14), Lane (UD 15), Ismael Laguna (two loss-avenging UD 15) and Ultiminio "Sugar" Ramos (a riot-marred KO 5 and a more routine KO 4). Versatility, technique, intelligence and conditioning were his calling cards as he produced a 14-4 (8 KOs) record in title fights, often fighting the scale to do so.

As for the question at hand – is Trinidad the all-time greatest Puerto Rican boxer? – the race comes down to Gomez, Trinidad, Calderon, Cotto and Ortiz based on their bodies of work. Calderon falls away because of his lesser quality of competition in comparison to the others (no current Hall of Famers) and because he was a pure boxer while the others were authentic boxer-punchers who demonstrated more versatility. Ortiz's quality of opposition was high and he had success against fellow champs (8-5-1, 4 KOs) and Hall of Famers (8-4-1, 4 KOs), but he is eliminated only because the men who'll be placed above him achieved better numbers at championship level, which, in discussions like these, serves as a decisive point of separation. Cotto, too, is a viable choice, but for reasons discussed earlier in this article, he, too, fell short.

As for Gomez vs. Trinidad, the race is extremely close. Both won their first titles at age 20 and they produced sustained excellence. Both pass the eye test in terms of skills, but Gomez had more offensive tools, was the better puncher at his best weight and, at his zenith, was the better defender with the sturdier chin. In terms of their Hall of Fame victims, Gomez's two KO wins over the undefeated Zarate and the still-close-to-his-prime Pintor supersedes Trinidad's decision victories over past-prime versions of Whitaker and Camacho, and his majority nod over a peaking and undefeated De La Hoya remains hotly disputed. Both dominated one division while achieving less in the other two, but beyond their peak weights, Trinidad has a significant advantage as he was 4-1 (3 KOs) with one KO loss in title fights at 154 and 160 while Gomez was 2-3 (0 KOs) with all three defeats by KO at 126 and 130. Also, Trinidad defeated 12 men who won titles during their careers compared to Gomez's nine, though, to be fair to Gomez, fewer belts were available during Gomez's era. Nevertheless, while Gomez was a better junior featherweight than Trinidad was as a welterweight, Tito's ability to take his power up the scale and produce better results in championship fights at higher weights proved decisive.

Given the evidence presented here, a strong argument can be made that Trinidad is indeed the greatest Puerto Rican fighter in history.

Lee Groves is a boxing writer and historian based in Friendly, West Virginia. He is a full member of the BWAA, from which he has won 20 writing awards, including two first-place awards, since 2006. He has been an elector for the International Boxing Hall of Fame since 2001 and is also a writer, researcher and punch-counter for CompuBox, Inc. as well as a panelist on "In This Corner: The Podcast" on FITE.TV. He is the author of "Tales from the Vault: A Celebration of 100 Boxing Closet Classics" (available on Amazon) and the co-author of "Muhammad Ali: By the Numbers" (also available on Amazon). To contact Groves about a personalized autographed copy, use the email l.groves@frontier.com or send him a message via Facebook or Twitter (@leegrovesboxing).

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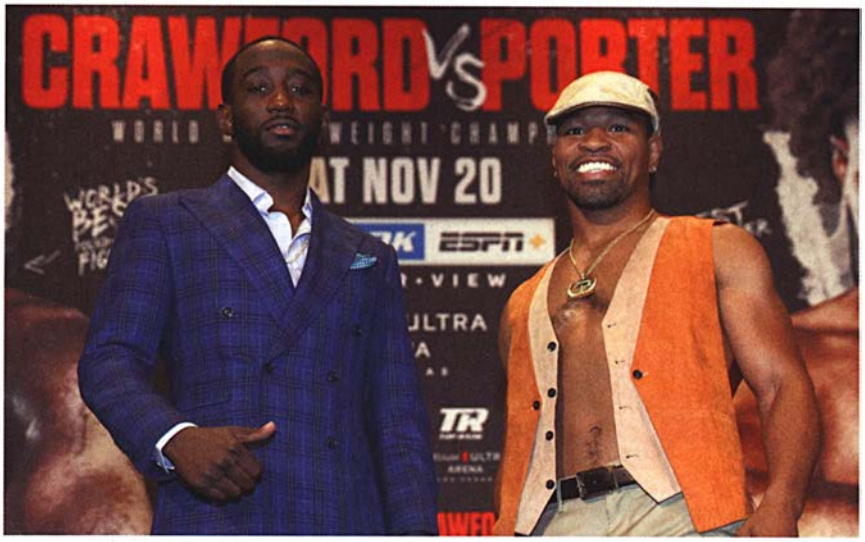
BAZOOKA DESTROYS HOLMES:

In the 12th defense of his legendary world title reign at 122 pounds, Puerto Rican great Wilfredo Gomez crushed the previously unbeaten Derrik Holmes. The Washington, D.C.-based challenger was decked eight times in five rounds before succumbing to the inevitable at the Caesars Palace Sports Pavilion in Las Vegas. Gomez made 17 defenses in total – a division record to this day – before relinquishing Ring Magazine and WBC titles in order to pursue further glory at featherweight and junior lightweight.

COMING UP



Terence Crawford and Shawn Porter will put friendship aside for 12 rounds on Nov. 20.

NOVEMBER

NOV. 5 – Mikaela Mayer vs. Maiva Hamadouche, junior lightweights (for vacant Ring, Mayer's WBO and Hamadouche's IBF titles), Las Vegas (ESPN+).

NOV. 6 – Canelo Alvarez vs. Caleb Plant, super middleweights (for Alvarez's Ring/WBA/WBC/WBO and Plant's IBF titles), Las Vegas (Showtime PPV).

NOV. 13 – Jaime Munguia vs. Gabriel Rosado, middleweights, Anaheim, California (DAZN).

NOV. 13 – David Benavidez vs. Jose Uzcategui, super middleweights, Phoenix (Showtime).

NOV. 13 – Kid Galahad vs. Kiko Martinez, featherweights (for Galahad's IBF title), Sheffield, England (DAZN). Also, Terri Harper vs. Alycia Baumgardner, junior lightweights (for Harper's WBC title).

NOV. 13 – Dina Thorslund vs. Zulina Munoz, bantamweights (for Thorslund's WBO title), Kolding, Denmark.

NOV. 19 – Murodjon Akhmadaliev vs. Ronny Rios, junior featherweights (for Akhmadaliev's IBF/WBA titles), Manchester, N.H. (DAZN). Also, Julio Cesar Martinez vs. McWilliams Arroyo, flyweights (for Martinez's WBC title); Demetrius Andrade vs. Jason Quigley, middleweights (for Andrade's WBO title); Kali Reis vs. Jessica Camara, junior welterweights (for Reis' WBA and vacant WBO titles).

NOV. 20 – Terence Crawford vs. Shawn Porter, welterweights (for Crawford's WBO title), Las Vegas (ESPN+ PPV).

NOV. 27 – Brandon Figueroa vs. Stephen Fulton, junior featherweights (for Figueroa's WBC title and Fulton's WBO title), Las Vegas (Showtime).

DECEMBER

DEC. 5 – Gervonta Davis vs. Rolando Romero, lightweights, Los Angeles (Showtime PPV).

DEC. 11 – Vasiliy Lomachenko vs. Richard Commey, lightweights, New York (ESPN/ESPN+).

DEC. 17 – Artur Beterbiev vs. Marcus Browne, light heavyweights (for Beterbiev's IBF/WBC titles), Montreal. Also, Marie Eve Dicaire vs. TBA, junior middleweights; Kim Clavel vs. TBA, junior flyweights.

DEC. 18 – Josh Taylor vs. Jack Catterall, junior welterweights (for Taylor's Ring/IBF/WBA/WBC/WBO titles), Glasgow, Scotland (ESPN/Sky).

DEC. 18 – Joseph Parker vs. Derek Chisora, heavyweights, Manchester (DAZN).

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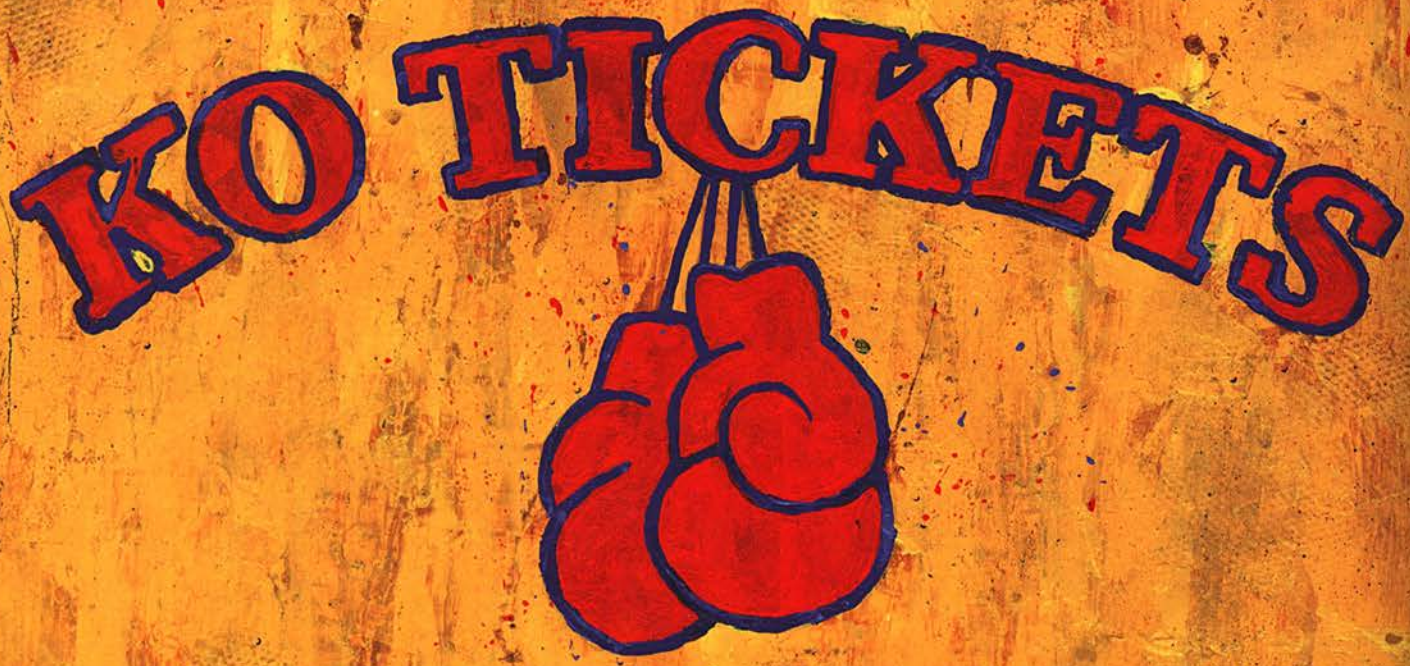

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